





# **STEVEN FRATTALI**

## **COLLECTED POEMS**

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***COLLECTED POEMS VOLUME THREE***

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***PERSON PLACE AND WORLD: A LATE MODERN  
READING OF FROST'S POETRY***

***HYPODERMIC LIGHT: THE POETRY OF PHILIP  
LAMANTIA AND THE QUESTION OF SURREALISM***

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## INITIALS

### **A Photograph of an Old Stone Doorway**

How many blizzards buried the ledge  
Of this stone doorway? Snow – the cold spit  
Of the world, from coldest emptiest space,  
Has covered these stones so many times,  
Worn them down so many years.

(All this occurred beyond the picture's time frame.)  
How soon it is the archaic we see around us.

And yet what door  
Withstands the weather of the world?

### **In the All Night Cafeteria**

Here, sitting alone, is one who stares  
Into the night and windows, which reflect  
The isolated streetlights, as now  
The bitter staleness an ashtray exhales  
Mingles with a dry fluorescent light.  
This hour belongs to the solitaires –  
And it may be enough, for here one knows  
The freedom of the night, its loneliness.

## Wild Grapes

How many new voices come in this wind?  
I hear them through the wall, tangled in vines  
Of wild grapes. They call hot fields to the mind,  
The afterimages of lines  
Traced by her hair in concert with the wind.

The room is cold. In the shadows of these drapes  
Some long fever has been stilled. I have made  
Such peace from discerning those fleeting shapes  
Wrought by the wind, by light and shade –  
Medieval pages, strange antiquities, wild grapes.

## **At Dawn**

The streetlights are dulled with the early sun  
That now bleeds through the dusk; at remote  
Extremes of sight, the city's rooftops float  
In the translucence of a summer dawn.

The faintest trace of light begins to seep  
Into the curtained room, where sleepers lie  
Amid shadows; where even the insomniac's eye  
Is stilled in the oblivion called sleep.

A special stillness, a diffuse obscurity,  
Quiets the street. Before the hot day burns  
The grass, after the clamors of the night,

The mind, calm, almost imperceptibly,  
Suspended, like the window's shade, now learns  
The tenuous edges of the dark and light.

## **To Emily Dickinson**

Letters, steeples, bees, Eternity –  
Candles that you burned, and from the sting  
Of dripping flame upon the skin we see  
Such shapes that you made brilliant in destroying.

The flame that pulses in the heart with fire's  
Simplicity, the sheerest tongue within  
That flickers in the wind of all desires,  
You held within a subtle discipline.

The simple absence which is solitude  
Made you attentive to the smallest sound  
Of evening air; in searching every mood  
The very words for every mood were found.

Now we, in what is left us of such art,  
Find that which is and yet is not a presence –  
Your voice within; as at the diamond's heart  
What is not fire burns in silence.

## Spring Warmth

The heavy ice upon the branch is thawed  
And the ground is wet for melting has begun  
With run-off water that leaves steaming mud  
And pools of ice water in the sun –  
The sun that warms and stirs and will make run  
The sticky sap within the heart of wood,  
Resinous blood that flushes through the grain  
Of branches that glisten in the morning light  
With melting ice that drips from them like rain.  
How all so unaccountably is right  
As spring warmth runs like sap through every part,  
A sap that rises from the earth and root  
Through every branch until the early shoot  
Stirs green inside the winter of the heart.

## A Change

These silences of heat and summer air,  
The burning stillness and late-morning haze,  
Are slowly changed, returned to what they were,  
As imperceptibly the summer days  
Become the past: the stillest change,  
An altering, still imperceptible –  
A quiet infinity, this difference; the grass  
Will soon be browning, then yellow in the later fall.

Soon the summer's heat will be dispersed  
By the cold wind, the leaves freeze to red  
In the sun's diluted warmth, and the first  
Hoarfrost will be icing the garden shed.  
Then the autumn noons will have begun  
To dry and tint the summer's last yield:  
The fading remnants of a more distant sun,  
The dimmer colors blotching the far hill's field.

## August Afternoon

It was an August afternoon and I,  
Alone in the hot field – I saw it pass  
In silences of blade and stem and sky,  
And I was as the watching of that grass.

The sun throbbed on my shoulder, and the air  
Was burning emptiness in which one breathed  
The warm still heat, that being merely there:  
The stagnant warmth and stillness of the field.

Yet there beneath the light and heat and sun,  
The silence and the grass untouched by breeze,  
One knew of something not part of the day,  
A point at which its influence must cease,

Removed from all the searchings of the sun,  
And for which time and motion, light and heat, were less  
Than that one knowledge, the pure reflective One.  
Yes, at one point one recognized just this.

## July

I wake and shield my eyes, for one could be  
Snow-blinded by the glare on such a day,  
When the midday sun reflected on the sea  
Makes diamonds of the sunlight and the foam  
That sparkle in the lightning of the bay  
And flashes out like mirrored sun on chrome.

The noon time heat beneath the hot white sun,  
The constant waves and burning monotony  
Render me half forgetful looking on:  
One feels the pure hypnotic of the sea,

A dark and glittering somnolence within  
The endless cresting of a single wave  
Receiving from itself that which it gave –  
Water made wave, then foam, then wave again.

## **White Rose Petals**

In the deep articulations of the rose,  
The flower, the emblem it is said, of love,  
Petals cover petals which then enclose  
A portion of that darkness they're part of.  
Here where it seems the beautiful abounds  
Petals chasing petals are impelled  
Around themselves until the flower surrounds  
That center where a sheer absence is held.  
For at the flower's heart the darkness is  
As nearly pure as white throughout the rest,  
Apparent opposites made one in this  
Complicity where both are manifest  
As each reflects the other there, displayed  
Within the flower that they both have made.

## **Along the Beach**

What is this path of walking as it takes  
The graduated changes of the sands,  
On which just as one walks the wind remakes  
The less than path, and where the less than land  
Remakes itself to be as it had been  
In neither merging with nor opposing wind  
With what it is or was, to be again  
What it had never been, and where we find  
No trace that one or any other thing could be  
But just, for all this time, the sandy shore  
With sand on all sides and the sea before,  
And sea chaff on the waves' complexity  
Of dissolution scattered to the strand,  
There gradually to be part of the sand?

## First Dawn Light

This pallor at first of gray light on the blind,  
Like mist or the dust of light, not yet gold,  
Or the pollen of light, accumulating, faintly defined  
Between curtain and sill as a tentative gold;

And birds in the twilit and shadowed trees sing  
While the air is still damp with the night,  
And sing dreaming, half waking, half sleeping,  
While the sky is still night and twilight;

And slowly the window is brightening, fading  
From vacant and absolute darkness to gray,  
As both time and the light by which each thing  
Brings forth its shadow foreshadow the day.

As day gathers light in the wakening mind,  
Birds sing in the green shade of leaves more clearly  
and strong,  
Yet bring forth no lyric to the heart at all but blind  
And inarticulate impulse, the shadow of song.

They cannot wholly waken, but can I?  
Both day and night our tyrannies of dream.  
And yet the early hour is possibility,  
The imminent day itself a world to come.

## Walking Home Across the Field

The shadows in the field lengthen in the evening light.  
I lead my shadow across the grass, walking against sunset  
As though against strong wind – the late light all sharp  
glare.

The sun low near the hill, igniting the horizon's trees,  
It slants its wash of light across the field –  
Across the low hills, the brown and matted grass,  
the outcroppings of rock –  
Its raying blears of orange and red fall on stray clumps of  
timothy, low bushes, tussocks of brown grass,  
The wind snagged black fir tops, the metal plate nailed in  
an old fence post –  
Just here and there a sudden glare of sun.

Now the wind gets stronger, the east sky blackening  
some more,  
And the sound of the wind is like whistling,  
or a fire burning –  
The strange speech twilight makes in empty disused pasture  
fields or deserted lots.  
It blows flat across the open field –  
A cold wind blowing in winter from the north.

Flocks of brown and tattered leaves pour across the pasture  
Where I walk and scatter out across the field.  
The tall brown grass is rippled and bent low.

The knotty branches of the wild apple trees  
Are swaying stiffened in the coming on of storm.

I raise my voice above the loud cold wind  
That blows across the grass and bare rock.

Sunset now is lower than the trees,  
Just a few bright gleams of orange-red light  
Through breaks in the tree line along the hill.  
And twilight deepens to the gray and brown of dusk ash.

**For L.D. (hit by a car) (1958 – 1982)**

I walked along the hill above the town.  
The night was cold. The late fall winds had taken  
The season's last leaves and their branches down,  
So hard had winds and winds together shaken.

What was I looking for? I couldn't tell,  
But picked a broken branch up from the ground  
And struck it against the tree from which it fell,  
And struck again, and listened for the sound.

But I could hardly hear: the wind was strong  
And battered down the tap of wood on wood,  
Of bone on bone. There was no sound or song  
So agonized that it could still be heard.

## Darkness, Pine Trees

This darkness of pine trees, the shattered wave,  
The mica glitter of sunlight on the water, far church bell.  
The twilight closes on you in these pine trees  
Who at the evening's hour have called me here.

In you there is a river and I seem to follow it.  
Wherever you would have me, there I go.  
And in the darkest current we must follow out  
I follow in my blindness and in surety.

For you are everywhere, your arms, your waist,  
Your silences are salve for any wound,  
And where your kisses touch, the honey of desire  
Must gather and then overflow the comb.

O fortunate enigma of your voice that calls,  
That darkens through my being in the dusk.  
And so at evening have seen the fields,  
The rippling corn beneath the shadows of the wind.

(after Neruda)

## This Dreaming Night of Jasmine

This dreaming night of jasmine and the sweet  
And penetrating odor of the rose, the warm  
nocturnal breeze  
Upon your sleeping face: this is the poise of hours  
Given never to return, hours of this night and this  
warm wind.

Beneath the window of our room the bay  
Splashes to the midnight beach, each wave a thought,  
A moment of some sleeping consciousness,  
The two of us as though we were two waves.

So we must fall immersed in that darkness,  
Moving through currents of the dead in sleep.  
What thread could ever guide us back again?  
Surely it must be more than just daylight.

When midday comes tomorrow we'll both climb  
The shore front hill that rises through the pines;  
Amid the salt sea wind and marine light  
We'll stand there on the needle-matted ground –

Noon turning the whitened cliff front sea to light,  
Marine breeze moving softly through the grove,  
And we two in that portico of trees  
Will be together, alone and confident.

## A Fragment of a Pastoral

I walked outside of town one afternoon.  
It was late August, the bright sun was hot.  
The grass was tall, hay-green and yellow-brown.  
The grass tops wavered in the warm dry breeze.

The path between two fields was hard and dry,  
Baked in the long-continued summer heat.  
The earth was cracked and dusty, an amber dust  
I scuffed up as I walked and which was blown  
And sifted in the hot dry breeze that stirred,  
Just now and then, the blue and still midday.

In one field were some twisted apple trees.  
The windows of the greenhouse and horse barn  
Sparked like mirrors, signaling to the blue.

I went into the field. The tall grass brushed my wrist.  
The field smelled warm, silent and still.  
It seethed with low, tiny, barely audible activity.

And then I was the center of the field  
No matter where I stood, the center point,  
And everything around me suddenly defined  
In widening circles outward from that spot.

I stood there staring in the steady heat.  
The sunny warm dry breeze sifted the grass.  
The grass was dry like hay. Dust from the road  
Was blown up now and then in little puffs.

## Death Valley

Mid-day sky, mid-drought: hot and white,  
With still heat and a hazy mid-day light  
That mingles with the sound of late cicadas  
In the burnt-out field. The meadow's grass  
Is intricately rippled by the breeze  
That blows in its dust-sifting intricacies.

Down low here where I sit the sun is hot  
And all the grass is burnt around the spot  
Where I am arbored in the apple tree's shade,  
And though I am the parching heat has made  
Me thirsty so, rising, I take my cup  
And over at the faucet fill it up.

The running water glitters in the tin,  
Cold water running over and within.  
Above: oppressive sunlight, the whitened sky's  
Intensive heat and burning blue asperities.  
It flows into the cup and overflows, but still  
It always seems impossible to fill.

There never pours out water quite enough –  
Fires of mid-day, insubstantial yet searing stuff  
Of angels' fires in stark glories of the sky  
That burns in fierce heat, punishing the eye,  
And thrown in harsh light downward to the earth,  
Parching the ground to make dust of the earth;

Omnipotent heat, an overwhelming light,  
Burning the skin, and darkening the sight  
In sheer profusion of a cosmic fire,  
The end of strength, the weakness of desire,  
In which the bright precision of the sun  
Extinguishes what life might have begun.

What is all that's made? For all that's done or said,  
The drought's un-intermitted, and the earth is dead:  
The grass is burnt, no rain, no single breath  
Of air amid the trees. For this is death  
That shows forth in its full intensity  
Beneath an arid wind and burning sky.

## Morning Knowledge

Still twilight, and  
In the morning's earliest hour I've come out –  
The garden in the early mist,  
Whited grass not printed yet, not yet streaked through,  
Rain fallen at early morning still dripping from the eaves;  
Here still damp with ground mist,  
At the garden's edge, the very blackest dirt, like coffee  
grounds;  
The curled-up bean vines, white-blossomed peas looking  
heavy and weighed down.  
How cold the back yard really is, although it's summer.

The sun is barely now just rising –  
First light not even yet red at the horizon,  
Somewhere beyond the still dark trees;  
In the still leaves, just the beginning of bird song,  
With morning's changing from twilight into dawn  
There is an active difference in the air  
Announcing summer day, but not yet its light,  
Not yet the transformations of the sun.

Before the light has touched the early rain,  
Still pearled in the green troughs of leaves, before  
The noon's hot stillness in the air,  
The hum of bees and insect murmur,  
One feels a knowledge in some deeper, other self,  
Obscure morning knowledge, just before day.

Break off a bit of green mint there,  
Still wet with cold rain or the morning's condensed mist –  
You have to breathe its fragrance, nothing else quite like it.  
Morning will wear to day, the sun will come  
Dispersing the last mist, the cool damp air,  
To bring the presence of the noon, its hot stillness, its sleep,  
its hidden life.

But by then you won't be there,  
Since you will go with morning, before the dew has dried,  
Before the coming heat, just before day.  
But when you go (perhaps you'll leave for good)  
You may at least break off this sprig of green mint.

### **In Memory of S. A.**

The quiet of the garden: evening's light  
Grows deeper as the sun burns in the trees,  
And gradually across the lawn one sees  
The shadows lengthen with the summer night.  
The moths have taken wing and one by one  
The stars make their appearance in the sky,  
The night breeze almost imperceptibly  
Has brought the scent of earth to where I lie,  
The scent of summer night where I, alone,  
Have come to rest and just think quietly.  
The night is still, the breeze blows now and then,  
The roses, their leaves blown by the soft breeze, stir,  
Delicate roses of the long summer,  
These flowers I see, have seen, and will again.

## DAY AND TIME, NIGHT AND TIME

### The Leaves Burning: A Fire Canticle

These are the fallen leaves that must be burned.  
The fire catches, spreads from leaf to leaf,  
And soon the whole pile is burning,  
Is one configuration of orange flame  
In which each leaf is quickly vanishing.

There is one point  
When leaf and fire are poised,  
Held in the tension of the leaf's outline –  
Extremity of fire within the form's persistence,  
Still form in the extremity of fire – when it  
And burning are held in burning, retained  
In their bright suspension.

And then they are released.  
The falling flame the leaf has now become  
Crumbles in the trembling heat  
And is just ash, the fire that possessed it merely fire.  
And so each single thing will burn, for everything  
That's worthy to be burned will burn  
Until there's nothing left of it –  
But no matter.

After the kindling, and before the end,  
In the falling partial equilibrium  
That holds apart these moments,  
There is the time.

## **To the West**

The molten steel of the sun  
Is settling and cooling now,  
Its ashes flake to copper  
Underneath and soot-marked bronze.

The islands of illuminated cloud –  
Grey-blue, dark slate, and mauve –  
Are like huge blinds set crosswise  
On the increasing fireball.

Ahead the telephone poles are black  
Against the red-orange sun,  
Amid the copper streams and glare  
They stand like charred black sticks.

The corn is flushed with pink light.  
My shadow stretches to the east  
Across the patched macadam  
Of the old north country road.

A deserted road leads toward  
The crumbling furnace core;  
Violet and carbon black obscure  
The spreading lava with its crust

Of cinders in the west.

## **Aubade: Composure**

The first light tints the eggshell walls  
From dimmest grey to violet,  
And light-spokes through the window's shade  
Glance over eyes asleep as yet.  
But light is opening within  
The mind still closeted in sleep,  
Like the Word creating space from void  
And a seed troubling the soil's sleep.

Asleep I am preparing to  
Begin once more my self-creation  
As wakening, like sap, flows through  
My limbs and my still sleeping reason.  
Organic balances of mind  
Emerge from the completing sum  
Of energy and intellect  
Breathing in equilibrium.

Therefore both rise together here  
In balance, buoyancy, on the tide  
Of darkness they in answer to  
Sunrise will shortly put aside.  
And breathing is a key to this,  
Breathing is the opening door  
That sways in when I let breath out  
And opens when I draw in more.

My body lives again and moves  
With an intelligent delight,  
My mind wakes in the morning air  
And opens to the retinal light.  
Here, now, I must resolve to live  
So that my mind, until my death,  
Will be this drawing, balancing,  
And perfect measuring of breath.

### **Blade of Grass**

We lie here thinking, waiting, not waiting,  
And have what we would have, the world, this time –  
My head is in your lap, the sun too high, too bright,  
The hot sun flaring on your hat's white brim.  
And then you shade my eyes like sleep, your face  
Dips down to mine, your long brown hair drapes down.  
There is no sun, the earth is only half  
The thing beneath me, love a kind of hand  
That draws us in a circle – perfect, whole –  
Until we are our world. Yet it's so light –  
Poised on a breath...a feather...delicate –  
A strand of hair is all that ties it, slight  
As the blade of grass that touches, taps my cheek.

## **A Bright Day in Late Winter**

The day breaks from the long-continued cold.  
The sun at ten o'clock is bright, and everywhere  
The partly melted puddles glare and burn,  
Flashing their shaving mirrors and blind spots.  
The sun is almost warm and waters flow  
Puddling like slow leaks from cracking ice.  
These are initial rivulets – not yet  
Of spring, though real and reflecting light.  
The whitest snow glints diamonds in the sun.  
The winter's salt is left in cloudy streaks  
And splotches on the dusty asphalt road,  
Like chalk ghosts on a blackboard not yet cleared.  
The pulse of spring breaks up the veins of ice.  
The ice is broken and flows as light touches it.

## **Doing Laundry**

I push my load of laundry down the street,  
Forty pounds in plastic bags – I've got a cart.  
Wind blows a wet snow which is partly sleet  
Straight in my eyes. My face is red and stung,  
My eyes half squint into the blowing snow,  
My hair is wet with droplets and crumbs of snow  
And I have trouble holding down my hat.  
In my boot a worn spot chafes my ankle raw.  
A treacherous slushy puddle threatens to upset the whole.  
I halt and straighten things a bit and then move on.  
Yet I can't say I mind the cold, the wet,  
Or coaxing the cart around icy pot-holes.  
Some part of me is scoured by the storm  
And wakes up in the wind and sharpening sleet.

## **On the Road in Late February**

Light touches the scars of winter's wound –  
The bright cold sun, the cut glass on snow banks,  
The startling, flashing puddles of bright chrome.  
My eyes and forehead aching with the squint  
I have to hold to move through solid light,  
My ears and nose, my whole face, dead with cold  
Just as though I were bandaged up with gauze,  
I walk the road now pitted, cracked, ice-worn.  
And yet I feel the first quick thaws afoot.  
The sun is over me. Light takes the world  
Into its transformations of substance.  
All things are beautiful with light now, radiant –  
Even the jagged fissures in the road.  
Up ahead the loose stones sparkle in the sun.

## Day and then Night

### I

The sun was burning the roof tops all day,  
Melting the tar back down to sticky gum.

Each roof gave off a watery heat shimmer  
In the glare. The town was subdued with heat.

No one went out but kept inside where blinds,  
Curtains, and air conditioners prevailed.

At eleven it was ninety, and at noon  
The sun reflected from the asphalt lot

Was murderous – not blinding but forbidding:  
Relentless light creating its own world,

Its burning glass the atmosphere itself  
Whose air was scorching, nearly unbearable.

The impact of the light on windows, chrome,  
On parking meters, stop signs, on plate glass,

Was hard enough to make you wince and squint.  
My eyes, my head, ached just to think of it.

The empty street seemed throbbing in the eye –  
The sidewalk shone as white as white marble

And buildings shimmered in a bright aura  
Of mirrored heat and steel-reflected shine.

## II

But now at evening things are cooling off,  
And gradually the sun is put aside;

Though not that flickering in the paper lamp  
Which hangs here from the arbor's vine-thick roof –

Its skin like a cicada's shell cast off,  
Yet holding a small flame within itself.

Nearly weightless – a balloon of pale parchment  
Tapped by the breeze and swaying quietly,

A sort of buoy in the tide of night  
That knocks the trellis softly now and then,

Its moonlight glowing in the brown darkness  
Of summer nightfall, giving sheltered light.

The afternoon heat gone, the burnt-out town  
Begins to stir, creating its own sounds.

The night breeze cools, assuages and restores  
Us to ourselves, gives air and comfort,

Breathing, movement out of doors – we hear  
The small stream's sound and feel still-living grass.

All these are given back, the earth itself  
Returned, restored to a human quality.

The only memory of day's hot sun  
Is in the stone slab of the garden seat

Which feels like a barely warm stove top,  
Although it too cools down and gives its warmth

To night's mysterious and just-dampened air.  
Indoors two reading lamps have been turned on.

And in the arbor, darkness is complete  
At last, what we had both been waiting for

And which we now possess. Our human life  
Is lighter than a feather, is just a breath.

First it is day, and then it's slowly night.  
With one breath I blow out the paper lamp.

## **The Lemon Tree**

The lemon on the lemon tree hangs there  
Suspended in the green house where the wind  
Is tempered to a gentle touch of air,  
And the sun is warm upon its yellow rind.  
So half-lit in the glare of midday sun  
That penetrates its shadowy thick leaves,  
The lemon bears a hot darkness within  
Distilled from all the light that it receives –  
The slowest distillation of noon light,  
For time is slowest when its gains are made,  
And heavy though it is, the fruit is swayed  
Within a rising wave of warmth and light.  
This moment: fragrant, still, the briefest sense  
Of some fulfillment – this day, this silence.

## **Woman in the Bath (after Bonnard)**

You lie in the half-lit bath, the water's light  
Reflecting tiles on the walls: the purple tinge  
The bath beads have imparted cannot quite  
Disguise the rose warmth of your pale skin  
Which has its more than luminous warm light.  
The tiles are dark. The soft gold light within  
The floating form they harbor half-asleep,  
Nearly awakened by the creaking hinge  
That softly tells of my departing glance,  
Cannot proceed from any other source,  
Nor can it make appeal to just one sense  
But must involve all beauty, all sadness  
For beauty in its casual radiance  
Within the dim confinement it must keep.

## Morning

I wake still dazed from last night's sleeping pills,  
Vague, still drowsiness, and yet renewed life,  
With death now introduced in increments –  
The fluttering pulse of days, brought back again  
To rival morning as the sun now high  
Warms up the room where I am still in bed,  
A chemical relaxation in the veins.  
One pill, another one, another every time...  
To bring that clarity within the light  
That shines in through the corner window there,  
A thought, a mood, brief radiance, transfiguration  
Into which you step. Your path will cross the light  
Sometimes, and then you will step out of it,  
Brought and transfigured and betrayed by time.

## **The Summons**

What voices murmured there at end of night? –  
Listening between daylight and dream.  
I listened to the roof eaves as their stream  
Of spring rain and bird song came with first light.

Waters that flowed into my train of thought  
Came down in whispers from the flooded roof;  
Day had returned, and if there needed proof,  
One couldn't help but hear what it had brought.

One couldn't help but hear the birds there were,  
Nor could one help but live again with day;  
There was a summons in the rain and song

That one must now come forth, must go along  
With all these transformations in the air  
And that which could not cease or go away.

## The Lamp

That morning when we woke to find the sun  
Reflected on the ceiling's eggshell white –  
The moteless watery light of later spring  
Was all we needed then – that place, that time.  
All that we later did was carry through  
The meaning of that moment – early joy  
Made firm and ratified by constancy.  
The flame that glimmers at the diamond's heart  
Is there at every turning. So is this.  
Beyond what any wind might give or take  
This much is ours – our life, this burning wick,  
The wick that burns the oil of our being,  
Our being blent and neither one nor two:  
The flame in which we two must find ourselves.

## **The Woman Who is a Figure of Light**

The morning's wave that shatters on the rock,  
The rock of winter's clear and frozen day,  
Has brought me from my sleep and to myself  
And you to me out of your depth of sleep.

Consciousness awakening in new power,  
And beauty here so warmly palpable –  
Clear light, and candor of your nakedness,  
And new appeal to the opened eye.

You lie beside me here, your form revealed  
In morning's moment of uncanny grace  
Brought in this breaking of the wave of light

That's here disclosed, your mystery of light  
To be but touched, and felt as much as seen –  
As light in your warm skin, this light of your warm skin.

## A Moment

The early summer's breeze  
its warmth  
And light  
Blows through the white lace curtains of our room  
There isn't anything that one could want  
Nor ever want to touch  
nor want to see  
There isn't anything that one could have  
More deeply than I have your breath  
You mine  
For it is like this light or breeze  
Caught for one moment here  
this breath of time

## An Invocation

Tonight a summer storm  
                    although the air is cool  
            like autumn

With its gusts of chilly rain  
                    its wind and spray

I sit alone and cannot help  
                    but think of your presence  
  
            as it might be  
                    were you here

And does the voice  
            that speaks now in my mind  
                    and renders any other sound  
            or any other voice  
                                except for yours  
irrelevant...

What does it say of you?

For you are there  
                    somewhere inside of me,  
            where thought meets thought,

Moment comes to moment –

                    in the sense of secrecy  
the deeper harmony  
                    myself

It must be there  
    your presence  
        in my mind

You –  
    the one vibration,  
        the tonality I call by name

Now surely I remember –  
        it is mingled with my own

You are not far

### **The Wind in the Doorway**

**M**y light screen door flies open, then slams shut.  
It's just the wind. The wind has entered in:

A presence come, an entity disclosed.  
And with its perfect being, emptiness,

It enters this one moment here, this passageway,  
The single instant of its passing strength:

A gust, a being present here, then gone –  
A momentary power returned to emptiness.

## Late Summer

Summer night.

The august and perennial silence of the earth.

From the field's black rim,  
From the center point of your gaze,  
The sky falls away  
Upward and upward.

Cloud-like geometries of stars spill out and out,  
So many – so far,  
And so just out of reach,  
Their circuits turning slowly as they go –  
Myriad points,  
Crossings and confusions  
Of lines and planes.

The crowds  
Are gone too far into the silence,  
No voices reach from there.

The empty space,  
So thin,  
Nonetheless swarms and swarms:  
So many cries,  
Memories  
Of silent fear, of  
Watchful silence, of witnesses  
Who turned away in silence.  
In the silence of the summer night  
So many 'nows' are echoing,  
But not eternally,

In their ever-present irrecoverable  
Absence,  
In this moment of past time,  
This time of torture, murder,  
Lies and money.

The sky exploding constantly with stars  
Opens out like a pine cone  
Scattering its seeds.

Space drops away  
Abysmally  
From my gaze forever and forever.  
I seem to sway  
A moment on my feet  
And to be peering into it  
As though into a well.

The night is crowded with the millions  
Like a single page.  
How could it hold so many?

Listen: you hear the calling of the crickets in late summer  
grass.  
Against the black trees, fireflies are sparkling.

Above,  
The sky echoes upward, outward,  
Deeper and deeper on.  
Beneath,  
The earth is silent, fragrant, cool,  
Solid beneath each step.  
How could it hold so many?

## Late Fall Morning

The sky's still dark. It's four o'clock  
With blue street lights in empty streets.  
The halo of the late fall moon  
Is ivory or a pale off-yellow  
As though it were shining through white wine.  
As they pass, the streaks of charcoal cloud,  
Spaced like the mantle on a pond,  
Are lit blue at their edges.  
*The communion of souls...*

-- Come, holy invisible light.

It's six o'clock. Awakened light  
Fans upward from a radiating point  
Below the hill; the sky is filled  
With iodine, violet, and green.  
Then molten steel – red and bronze –  
Breaks through a pin-hole in the clouds.  
Suddenly there are several more  
Like ruled lines, narrow points of light.  
*The forgiveness of sins...*

-- Come, barely visible light.

It's eight o'clock. The sky is blue  
With white clouds and bright smoky sun.  
There's icy mist and low ground fog,  
The river's flat, metallic, bright –  
So cold it gives off braids of steam.  
Luminous smoke like white phosphorous  
Plumes up from smoke stacks on the hill.  
Traffic moves along the bridge.  
*The resurrection of the body...*

-- Come, indecipherable light.

Ten o'clock. Cars, buses and trucks  
Move along the central routes  
And out toward the peripheries  
And then return on different routes.  
Downtown the traffic lights control  
The arrivals and departures.  
The noise increases, here and there  
Trucks blare out grimy diesel fumes.  
*And life everlasting...*

-- Come, undetectable light.

It's twelve o'clock. The streets are full  
Of people temporarily  
Released from what they do all day  
(Let out of work, they call it work) –  
Hamburgers, salads, soup and coffee,  
A new prescription, a bill to pay....  
The air is brimming with the noise  
Of traffic and of thousands talking.  
*The communion of souls...*

--Come, wholly invisible light.

## November Leaf

I

Early morning, November.  
I walk out toward the sun

Streaming through horizon  
Cloud-fissures – toward

Snow clouds of ash grey,  
Coal blue, violet, and carbon,

Toward the raying funnel  
Of gold-bronze

And mercurochrome beamings  
Announced into silence.

Twilight of dawn-gloaming.

Blue light in the dawn-evening.  
Dawn sunset.

## II

On the road ten yards ahead  
A small puddle of light

Glimmers like a wafer of mercury  
In the morning's frost-sun.

Closer, I notice the ice film  
The sunrise skims with its glare.

It's like a transparent membrane –  
Almost invisibly fine,

A fan-shaped network  
Of filaments, ridges, and veins,

Like the underside of a leaf –  
The ice-leaf of late autumn.

### III

The ice is a fragile lens,  
The sustaining water a pupil,

A contact lens, perhaps, afloat  
On the black iris

Of unfrozen water  
Which borders it on all sides.

Part of the ice-leaf  
Has already flaked off

Like some sort of continental drift.  
Within one particular crack

The sunlight bleeds in the cold  
Shallow pool, an acetylene tear

Tiny and haunting the water  
At an indeterminate depth.

#### IV

The edge of the ice, the fluid border  
Between itself and the water,

Is wavy, irregular, although  
Remarkably smooth.

At times it's impossible to tell  
Where the ice-leaf leaves off

And the surrounding puddle begins.  
As the temperature gets above freezing

It will thaw more and more.  
Already at the translucent edge

It is leaking back,  
Melting away to the indefinite –

The leaf-film melts  
To the far glitter of sun

In the nearly depthless puddle  
Of light and cold water,

The bright water-void.

## Night Plane

*The sound...*

You lie beside me in the dark room,  
Sleeping, partly turned away.  
I lay my hand along your back.  
I can feel your rib cage rise and fall.

*Of a plane in the night...*

Listening to the droning sound,  
Imagining some other time and place,  
I close my eyes:  
A charred roof burning, crumbling in,  
Flaking away like newspaper ash.  
The dense incinerating wave  
Of burning jellied gasoline.  
The delicate plume-like spread  
And eerie glow of white phosphorous.  
Ropes and funnels of black smoke.  
Screams of a kind I can't describe.

*Overhead.*

Time and place. The room is quiet, cool.  
The autumn night has brought its fragrances.  
September breeze blows in. It's late.  
Self and other. Time and place.

My eyes are still closed. Our bed floats  
Out into the sea which is the night,  
Which is a sea. Yet still the night.  
The world is an idea once again.  
The sound grows fainter, Dopplers away, and dies.

We are left in a wide ship's wake of silence.

## October

### I

Early morning. Frost-cold. Vapor of breath.  
The path leads down to the road.  
Cold smoky sun. Bright sun-smoke. White fog.

The oak tree grows out of solid mist.  
Beyond, the world is a cloud.

### II

Rusty leaves, red leaves and orange leaves,  
Float in the puddle.  
A leaf in my right eye, and my brow floats  
somewhere beyond that.  
Glitter and glare in the blue sky-water.

One more leaf falls,  
Touching the sun.

No ripples.

### III

The pond  
On a warm afternoon.

The tall grass is blond,  
Very light yellow, green, and gold.

The cicadas which in summer  
Would be loud here  
Are silent.

I toss in one pebble.

First there's the splash,  
Then the silence again.

Then the cicadas' silence.  
Then the silence of silence.

#### IV

October afternoon.  
Gold leaves and warm sunshine.  
There are wasps at my window.

Point by point, the light alters.

By evening the wasps are gone.

#### V

Autumn evening.  
The sun slants across the hills and gold trees, the  
shadows reach out so far.

My window's still open:  
I hear sounds from the street – a radio, cars,  
someone walking.

My coffee cup  
Casts a long shadow across  
My white paper.

## **Out in the Open**

The slanting rain comes on and on!  
The cold drops blear and blur the sun  
When they hang in my eyelashes.  
My heavy stomp in the mud mashes  
The leaves and twigs and mud together.  
I plough on through the battering weather.

I walk with my wet face toward the sun  
That glares along the field's tree line,  
The bruised clouds straight up over me;  
The rain stops momentarily  
Then starts again, with hails stones  
As hard as small white peppercorns.

The sun is down low, almost home,  
And red-orange like mercurochrome –  
A tinting light across wet hay.  
The end of day comes gradually.  
But since I've let the rain and light  
Soak into me, I may keep on toward night.

## Under the Plum Tree

I lie here beneath  
The branches of plum,  
My eyes closed in shade,  
My chest in the sun.

Through tremulous eyelids  
I sense the dark blades  
That sway over me,  
As though I could see  
With the feeling of 'eye.'

And slowly my chest  
Grows warm in the sun,  
The skin pulls and tingles  
And blossoms in bone.

My forehead relaxes  
And I fill with warm light  
Which pulses and slows  
In diminishing waves,  
The cords of my body  
Loosen their knot.

Gradually, lastly,  
Almost nothing is left  
Except the slight sound  
Of my unisistent breath  
And the feeling of light  
Rushing on without end.

## Processes of Day

The sun is setting now, the end of day –  
And on the distant water, grown quite still,  
A glare of evening light, like an acetylene flame,  
A track of solid yellow, white at its center point,  
Gold, almost blinding at its edges,  
That reaches out across the evening lake.

The breeze dies down, the evening settles in,  
And everything is quiet.  
Before too long the lake is flat and still  
And one can almost see each splash,  
Each ripple break the surface of that glass:  
The leap of a fish that leaves its sparkling circles  
widening –  
The water spider's track, the dragonfly,  
The drifting motes within the sunset's light.

The air is motionless, the water filled with hills.  
There is the sense of an activity  
Within the glare reflected on the water's surface.  
The stillness of the evening, of the air,  
Is something poised. One has the sense  
Of something set to happen which has not yet occurred,  
Though present nonetheless amid the processes of evening:  
Declining sun, the evening's flooding light,  
The water sparkling quietly.

And later,  
The sunset is in haze, a smoky red  
With orange far off now barred with purple clouds  
That fade down to the black horizon  
In shades of mauve and green and blue.

And now there is no wind, no breeze at all.

The night assumes its full dimensions now.  
The stillness of the air is on the lake, its ripples less  
and less,  
A stillness different from the evening's quietude.  
The moths are out; and now the moon  
Presides above the water's placid reach  
With ripples sparkling in its faintest tracks.

The scent of water and the scent of night  
Are in the air, and mingled with them both  
The scent of pines,  
An essence carried in their dark branches  
And carried on the stillness of the warm night air –  
The summer night distilled here in the dark.  
And in the shadows of these pines you know the truth –  
The beauty of the world, so filled with light,  
And filled also with powers: it must be here  
That one finds strength or happiness,  
Amid these processes of day and of the night.

## Summer Night: Canticale

How often late at night  
I've listened to the wind that stirred  
And rustled in the summer trees  
When after rain the scent of rain  
Still lingered in the air.

Listening,  
What was it that I could have felt or heard? –  
A dampness and the scent of summer's earth  
Now newly wet  
And the random ceaseless stirring  
Of the leaves,  
The wind, the leaves.

The summer night was  
Movement  
Coming into that which gave it being,  
Embodied it in rain  
And wind  
And the fragrance of the night.  
The darkness was itself  
A substance that one felt  
And knew,  
The manifold events  
Of summer  
Taking place outside the window.

I sat there  
Listening. The storm had lasted  
Through the evening and so now  
Since it was late  
I felt it as the aftermath of storm,  
And I was listening to what was gone,  
Its traces vanishing.

The night  
Or that dark element it was  
Was closer to myself than I myself,  
A fragrance that one breathed, a process  
Taking place without  
And implicating processes within:  
The flowing, the activity of rain and wind,  
A whirlpool that converged  
Upon the center  
That I was,  
The dim and questioning,  
The infinite regress  
Of self.

It seemed  
That I was  
Falling as I searched within  
That secrecy,  
The object of my thoughts,  
And all the constant movement of the night  
Was just sound in my ears:  
Reverberating,  
Echoing through the emptiness,  
The space the echo of each thought had filled  
Not gathered to a single point,  
Dispersed in many scattered  
Points of time,

And all the random energy of storm  
Remote and faint  
Like something heard in sleep.

Yet all was traces  
Of a substance, of a speech,  
A rushing sensed and made, in darkness, more complex.  
How could there still have been  
Some feeling to be known,  
Some contact with the being of the world?  
Within the flowing power of the night and wind  
It seemed I was one element  
Immersed in both the substance  
And the stream.

I waited,  
But the night's activity of presence  
Was yet so light  
And poised between  
Non-being and the past  
For any thought or feeling I might have.  
And so I sat and listened  
To the sounds outside, now distant, growing more so  
As I sat and thought  
And sometime after midnight  
Fell asleep.  
And somewhere  
On the point of sleep  
I heard the summer night, for one last time.  
It was a fragment of the thing that I was leaving,  
Leaving to return to, since not yet found.

## An Incident of Enchantment

All night

The house had drummed and echoed  
With vibrations of the rain.  
In the dark, the steady powers of the rain  
Flowed down me as I slept.  
It was a flood inside of me that rose  
And brimmed the small cracked cup of consciousness  
Until it was a well once more,  
Until I woke.

I went out

And stood beneath the eaves and shadows of the fir.  
Night blue, dark green, black branches –  
Weighty, needle-laden,  
Massed with tilting tier on top of tier –  
Created layers of earthen darkness,  
A canopy and quiet place,  
Humidly still  
With tapping gelid drips  
Amid the clattering of rain.

In this place

The dark was cool, penetrating  
And perfumed with fragrant resins –  
Potent, primitive, and liberating;  
The sweet and dampened air  
Was more powerful than any drug.  
The tilting ladder of the branches over me  
Was toppling its loads  
Of shattering and misty rain,  
Its gusts of breeze  
And heady ozone scent.

Halfway up the ladder  
The moon flashed –  
And leaning, with head tilted back,  
I climbed the chevrons upward toward the light  
Which blinked there, glimmering like a silver coin  
Far at the bottom of the tree's night-well,  
Its darkness of crossed branches.

I swayed there, singing softly,  
Moving with the rhythms of the tree  
And glimpsing now and then  
The beacon of the moon.  
My eyes, accustomed to the moon  
And seeing just its one white light,  
No longer noticed  
Night beyond the trees,  
But only knew the black and blue green  
Nave of tree, the pillar of the tree,  
The tree's black cupola,  
Its turning cosmos hung with needles, cones, and stars.

Outside  
The night fell gradually away,  
The rain had stopped long since.  
The moon, as large as any sun,  
Shone like a klieg light – round and white and hot.  
And when I looked down where I'd been  
The lawn was just a carbon smudge;  
The house, a papery structure in moon-glow,  
Was charred to brown  
Like paper burnt,  
Or like moth wings. It blew away  
Or flew up to the light – was gone.

And then I knew that every other thing  
Was gone as well, was far away:  
The earthly night was far,  
The day was far,  
And I myself, gone farthest of them all,  
Sat watching quietly  
In that distant spot.

## **The Public Square (after de Chirico)**

I sit here watching the light and shadows  
In the empty square this evening.  
The concrete wall across the way  
Is tinted to an ochre warmth.

The old brick store fronts, the courthouse,  
The library and bank,  
Are caught in dusty laterals of copper light;  
The edges of their roofs blur in the translucent orange.

Gold and peach colors like the moons of Jupiter  
Glow in a puddle  
By the municipal parking garage;  
Steel edges and glass panels flare and spark.

In the square, the shadow of the Civil War memorial  
Is long and startlingly precise.  
Black cannon balls are stacked in pyramids  
On two sides of the granite obelisk,

With tar-black siege mortars presiding  
On the other two. Beyond,  
The courthouse dome is charred  
Against the evening sky.

Its tiles look like weathered copper,  
Green as the stain  
Left by a cheap gold ring,  
Or possibly the color of old bills.

A color near to these  
Is on the boot, waistcoat, and cheek  
Of the distinguished Reconstruction era  
Senator who guards the steps.

A greenish patina has covered him;  
His brow is streaked and caked  
Much like an old corroded cent.  
Mounted on his granite pedestal,

He stands with one hand inside his jacket  
As though nursing a cracked rib.  
The illusory plane  
Of his imaginary Senate floor

Extends from this point  
To the north, south, east, and west –  
Outward indefinitely,  
Perhaps eight feet above the ground.

Caught in the sun, the granite  
Of the pedestal's near side  
Twinkles  
With bright flecks of light.

The stone turns pink,  
Then orange with roseate gold  
Which cools  
To deeper gold. Suddenly

The shadow of a man is there. It lengthens,  
Reaches out across both pedestal and sidewalk,  
Broken like a stick half-way in water,  
Then it slides away.

The air itself turns faintly pink,  
The atmosphere unreal; the light  
Is compromised, auroral – full of loneliness  
In the encroaching dusk.

In the iodine light of sunset,  
Shadows tilt out far across the disembodied world;  
If you stand, your silhouette reaches  
To the far side of the square.

Momentarily the dusty space  
Is haunted as with vanished lives,  
Past time, presentiment, fatality.  
The time is charged, the atmosphere is poised.

The moment bears the weight  
Of something piled high and teetering.  
The cataclysmic change which never came  
Is echoing and echoing

In the silence, everywhere.  
Soon in the amber twilight  
The buildings will be old daguerreotypes,  
Old drawings, weightless, tinted diagrams.

Generations of shadows move  
Among the pillars of the darkened courthouse,  
From pediments and from the corners  
Near the walls, ranks of shadows

Advancing, retreating – they move as with  
A sound of whispers without words and without sense,  
Their mounting silence muffled  
By the tap and scrape

Of one stray paper blown along,  
Or by the echo of my feet.  
Day after day I've sat here in the square  
For half the afternoon

And into dusk. The long-awaited moment –  
Unexpected, curious – establishes itself,  
Then lengthens, lengthens further,  
Darkens, and becomes the night.

### **Returning from an Early Walk**

The mid-September sky is dawn-violet.  
The clouds to the east are heather, though the east sky  
is green.

A curved incision of moon is set high  
Against blackness. Four fingers below it – one star.  
My breath clouds upward. I lower my hand.  
My shoes are soaked from the wet grass.  
The back porch steps are slippery with dew.

## Sunlight and White Curtain

And as I sat there absently the light,  
The sun, the light of afternoon, shone through  
The open window and the polished blond  
Oak floor boards caught here and there a glare,  
A brilliance seen though not just then looked for.  
And in the sunny breeze the white lace curtains  
Swayed, then filled, dilated, settled back,  
And dilated again. I breathed in and  
Breathed out; and that which I called I, the I,  
Was like a curtain swaying and then falling  
As I breathed...  
A closing and then opening to light,  
The curtain filling with the summer breeze  
And caught, for just that moment, in the sun.

## Staying Up Late

I stayed up very late one night,  
And though the fire burned near the grate  
I didn't sense, or care, how late  
It was in that peculiar light.

Outside the storm whipped through the trees:  
The autumn ending with cold rain  
And hard wind punishing the leaves  
And the hail's kernels on the pane.

I sat and watched the fire consume  
One log and then another one,  
Die down a bit, and then resume  
High burning until that was done.

The fire was getting near the end  
Of its brief time; the night outside  
Seemed lulled into deep quietude.  
There had long ceased to be a wind.

The room was dark and still; no more  
Disquiet, all that put away.  
The sparkling popping embers lay  
Like stars upon the midnight's floor.

## In the Arbor

Now in the silence of the summer night  
And dark embowered closeness of the midnight arbor  
You sit and listen to the night, its sounds or lack of them.  
The air is quiet, fragrant with the summer's earth,  
And every now and then the slightest breeze  
Will blow and rustle in the grape vines on the roof  
And touch the yellow roses on the wall.

Think of the time extending from this point  
Of darkness, from this present given up  
To absence of all light, to that which seems  
Itself all light, some point within your past  
Displaying like an emblem  
That which for so long you strained to know,  
The so long sought for through all turnings  
Of the self and circumstance yet never found,  
Your happiness –

an image, nothing more.

That such a thing, so small,  
Should with such ease make summary  
Of all that has impelled you through the years,  
(Less than the leaf that just now touches  
At your cheek – yes, less than that)  
And that it should be the index for the depth  
Of your life's failure  
For you were never so,  
Not happy once.

The night is dark,  
Yet now you think that only in the arbor  
Can one know the nature of true darkness:  
You cannot see the roses on the wall

Nor any of the grapes along the trellis  
Not yet the leaf that still  
Is tapping at your cheek.

For all you see is darkness.  
And now in staring into darkness  
This narrow arbor becomes all the night,  
Both small embowered closure  
And infinite expanse,  
As you within your mind  
Are closeted so straightly there  
Within the narrow confines of the self,  
Yet cannot for all that  
Define the self's most simple truth.

Your thought one point,  
A match struck  
In the darkness of that night  
That time has made of you,  
You sit and try to think of your past life  
And only know how little of it yields  
To memory, as though it never was.  
And those few images that come –  
How did they come to have that sequence,  
This subtle influence of time long past the fact  
Into the calm still water of the self tonight?  
What currents and what eddies of that stream  
Can you find there  
That tell of something clear and sure,  
Not dark or fleeting in itself?

There has to be some way for you to know  
The reason that you've come to just this point  
Of circumstance, of place and time,  
The graduated closing of your life,  
And finally this arbor –

Quiet, dark  
And stilling every beauty in the heart;  
Just as all the scattered points of light  
In the night sky  
Have their geometry, the mariner not lost  
If he has them.  
There has to be some way for you to know.

Instead, and without reason,  
You think of just one moment from your past,  
Of that one day you lay in the summer's field  
And looked into the sun, the hot blue sky,  
The midday sunlight soaking into you  
And filling you with its searching heat.  
You closed your eyes, the light shone through the lids,  
A glowing red pulse, a warmth that filled your senses,  
Your whole being, and became  
The impulse of your life itself  
Made sharp, increased,  
And brought to just that point  
Where you could not distinguish your inherent warmth,  
Your blood, yourself, from being burnt.

You lay there long enough. The breeze had stopped,  
And then you heard the hum of the cicadas  
Off somewhere in the field – remote, abstract –  
That turned into a thought you felt within  
The pulses of your eyes, your temples, throat;  
Your body softly throbbed  
And you felt beneath your shoulder blades  
Sharp stubble grass and twigs.  
And gradually you woke.

What was it, could it have been? The memory that  
you've had  
For all this time not showing anything  
Of what it meant. And now you are aware  
That time has passed;  
You feel the lateness from the night's damp air.  
There is no use in thinking anymore.  
You feel yourself quite tired, and you know  
You must get up and go into the house and go  
to bed and sleep.  
Someone has left the porch light on for you.

And yet something delays you, keeps you here,  
A falling into drowsiness and dream.  
Why should you rise to go when rest  
Is in the arbor, here, all but complete?  
Embowered sleep amid this darkness and the scent  
of summer's earth.  
And yet you know you'll soon get up to leave,  
But not just yet, you cannot leave just yet;  
You have to stay and think a little more.

## Attainment

Tonight I write no poems, let the breeze  
That fluctuates the odors of the garden be enough.  
The dark is almost here,  
The shadows gradually become the night  
And deeper silence settles in.

The arbor where I sit is dark and still.  
The scent of earth pervades it like a thought.  
The grapes are clustered thickly on the roof  
And roses twine along the latticed wall,  
Rich yellow roses in the last of light.

I take and pluck one petal from a rose.

Now feel its subtle texture, slight and soft,  
Between your fingers there – it stills all thought.  
The night is dark, the place is darker still  
Where you and I sit quietly together – now and here.

Close your eyes. Don't think of what is past  
Or think of any future that might come.  
This silence, this one moment – this is all,  
The one fulfillment that you're sure to know.

The night is fragrant, heavy with the scent  
Of honeysuckle, roses, and the scent of earth.  
And in the arbor darkness is complete.

A stillness all around is stillness in the heart,  
Don't ask for what the evening cannot give.  
Think all attainment trivial to the heart.  
This is attainment, here within this dark.

## The Web

Tonight this street  
So overshadowed by the chestnut and red maple trees  
Is darker than at any other time.  
Night is mysterious always, but in summer it seems more  
so still  
And its darkness is compounded here.

Here the shadows on the walk  
Are deeply layered, thick  
And almost tactile, atmospheric,  
Creating their own ambiance, their place and time;  
The shadows of so many tiers of leaves –  
These areas of India ink, this active and sensuous blackness  
Smelling of grass, damp earth, new honeysuckle flower –  
All this is anything but the mere absence of light  
But, perfect in its own subtle existence,  
Reveals its special dimension of the world.

In this way summer fills and completes the night.

It fills it with the ragged lace work of the trees,  
The aromatic bushes and sweet flowering shrubs –  
The grass grows tall, ragweed and goldenrod  
Stand flourishing to loll their crests,  
Their unkempt silhouettes darkening the vacant lot;  
You notice the clutch and curl of squash vines  
Around the wire fence  
In the moon's moth-populated light.



And then I move on farther, out of the tree's reach –  
I have to bow my head to pass,  
The ragged branches sag so deeply down.  
And as I pass I feel it on my neck  
And at my back –  
The shadows of the leaves, and not just leaves,  
The shadows of the night,  
The million intimate incalculable threads,  
Alien and indispensable.

## **A Walk into the Summer Night**

The warm  
Night breeze has brought me this,  
The scent of earth, of the humid rich black soil  
Now opened up and bringing forth the squash, tomatoes,  
And the pepper plants, the fragrant leaves of basil  
And the onions too, the weeds that gather  
Near the edges of the garden,  
The essence of the summer's living body in this scent.

And then the green pea vines,  
The vines of pole beans climbing in the sun  
That with their flowers and their broad green leaves  
Are searching out the light and heat of day,  
The tall sunflower open to the light  
To be the emblem of the summer afternoon,  
Attentive to the sun and surely following  
Its arc from hour to hour  
In living joy beneath its light and heat.

And yet in the suggestion of this scent  
There is a heaviness too much of earth.

And as you walk into the summer night  
You breathe its rich and complex scent  
And take it deep within.

It must be part of you,  
The inmost knowledge that you wrest  
From all your errant contact with the world –  
The warm night breeze that blows across your face,  
The moon that – copper, orange, and full – shines down,  
The midnight air.  
All takes you in, accepts you – you are here,  
And so must take your place within this night.

## Night Flowering

Tonight in the warm breeze  
In which the sweetish fragrance of the pine,  
Of mown grass, of the tentacled white honeysuckle,  
That with the warm indefinite deep perfume  
That seems the out-breathed essence of the night itself,  
Are mingled in the air,  
One breathes not any ordinary breath  
But rather intimation, this deep fragrance – summer,  
Its close, breeze-blown and yet so heavy sweetness –

--it is within me, I within it,  
Breathing it in within each breath.

What is this substance ‘night’  
I take into the inward purpose of myself,  
My lungs, my breathing, my living, moving ?

--However warm  
With summer’s scent the wind might be,  
Each breath is yet as fragile as a petal,  
A complex of correlations  
Like a rose, or like a compass rose.

This therefore is night – aromatic and close,  
Here in the darkest shade and shadows  
Under the pine tree, its blue green soft needles  
In moonlight, scent of its resin – aromatic, close –  
Like honey and turpentine mingled –

and then  
The branching column of the trunk,

Moonlit branches roughly scaled,  
The gnarled, knuckled roots  
Clutching the red brown dirt.  
The pine's perfume penetrates so deeply here.

The summer night  
Is concentrated at this point, so that  
I know I must be part of it, as it  
Is part of me – this flowering of night I breathe  
Within its dark profusions, enveloping.

## Winter Night by the Fire

I lie here in the dark, a winter dark,  
My meeting with the temporary blank of sleep  
Postponed...thinking prevents me here.

Repeatedly my hand goes through my hair.  
The clock is ticking and my mind ticks too.  
The radiator pings and cracks.

Passing headlights sweep across the ceiling.

I turn the lamp on to read a bit,  
Then snap it off.  
The light dissolves in black – which seethes a moment –  
Then reappears in settled darkness  
As a standing shade.

The dark is full of pinpricks, pinpoints...  
My forehead full of the pulsing  
Fragments of the day.

But yesterday evening, I remember,  
My friend and I  
Sat together in her living room  
Before the fire which threw its warmth on both of us.

We sat in front of it,  
As though we were intent to warm ourselves,  
And reaching out our hands  
As though to test its heat

Accepted on our hands and down our arms  
And on our faces  
Its altering, peculiar warmth and light.

Her face was different in the fire,  
Changed in its intermittent transfiguration, in a light  
Reflecting the presence of darkness.  
There was a color on her throat and on her hair,  
Flickering on her face, and all along her arms.

I rose and stood before the fire  
And then went closer still.  
The heat was like a furnace, or like watching,  
From across the street, a building burning,  
When with each new explosion you feel a pulse of heat  
Against your face, which tightens, pulls and tingles,  
Is parched, and your eyes are baked dry.

I stared into the flames as though into a well.

Later,  
We might have watched the embers settling:

The log charred black,  
A bark of whitish powder flaking off, a core of glow,

And underneath the grate, on the dark floor,  
Some points of sparkling light –

Just here and there, a kind of constellation  
Which, half unnoticed, point by point, went out.

But by then we were asleep at last,  
Dreaming of the embers, and dreaming of the fire.

## Beyond the Black Hill

Beyond the black hill,  
Past the sunset's charred edge,  
Beyond its wire cage of trees, I glimpse  
Bright streaks and scarves of evening cloud.

Light falls. The hill, illuminated now, burns up  
In yellow, gold, and crimson. Higher,  
There's an acid turquoise-green with orange  
and opal clouds  
Flowing outward from the sun.

To the east, and to the north and south,  
The sky is a cooler lavender and gray.  
The inclination deepens it to cobalt  
At horizon's edge. The moon is not yet out.

Above, bright cumulus and cirrus clouds  
Tiered at four levels  
All pour across the sky due east.  
The wind is driving all continually,

At different rates, which also fluctuate,  
Retarding some, advancing some,  
At several altitudes at once  
And throughout four dimensions of change.

At moments the lower strata  
Flow ahead decisively,  
While the higher drift becalmed  
In a luminous near-stasis, like radiant stained glass.

A trapezoid of open space,  
Perhaps five miles across  
And filled with eerie yellow light  
Opens and steadily expands.

Then quickly its dimensions shift.  
It closes on itself, as invisible balances,  
Asymmetries, and powers realign  
And falter toward new congregating forms.

The wind continues strong – I hear it, feel it.  
The light grows deeper, taking on more violet and rose.  
The hills grow dark, recede,  
And the hilltop trees are jagged charcoal sticks.

The cloud-filled and illuminated  
Areas of the sky  
Are full of movement, of the wind and not the wind –  
Evolving shapes of light and cloud,

The flowing onward, backward, upward  
Of the sky and of the earth. Impending powers  
Burn in the overhanging glories of the sky.  
The reticent cipher of the world,

Crossed and re-crossed with lengthening,  
Distended shadows  
Tilting outward to its edge,  
Will never speak its word,

Yet the sky is full of energy that cannot be contained.  
The world is burning up  
And darkening like paper,  
Is toppling forward to become new worlds.

I feel the moment crumbling  
Like broken asphalt underneath my feet.  
I feel the ground beneath me still. The world is silent.  
The clouds are moving on. The wind still blows.

At moments it's as though  
The clouds are motionless,  
The earth itself is drifting backward,  
Flowing back, or falling slowly downward and away.

We're falling as we stand and watch,  
I feel the spiraling collapse.  
I feel the conflagration of the sun  
Through every particle of earth.

The vibratory energy of light  
Is radiated throughout time and space.  
The sun burns into us –  
It flashes – for an instant I can't see.

The wind is in my ears,  
And for a second I can't hear.  
Momentarily we're overwhelmed  
By the undepictable powers of the world.

What does it matter, what does it mean  
That we have stood here side by side, right now?  
Have we been witnesses? To what?  
We don't know what we are, or what we've seen.

Again and again my thoughts reach out  
In divination searching time and space  
To touch upon the ways, the passages,  
By which you've come to be right here, right now,

By which I've come to be.  
The inaudible, unsearchable eludes me.  
Only the darkening script of sunset  
Shows itself, and only to the eye.

The earth is like an ember in the fire –  
And the two of us are like two sparks  
In a momentary draft blown upward,  
Upward, upward, upward

And out into the night.

## NORTH AND SOUTH

### Back to School

You walk through the field in the afternoon,  
Pausing here and there.  
It is early in September.

There is a moment in late afternoon  
When listening is altered,  
And the ear takes in a quieter and constant sound,  
Quieter than breezes through the grass  
Or the movement of the leaves.

What is that sound?  
What is it that you're looking for?  
Could you say if I were there?

## Sleepwalking Ballad

Walking drifting I am  
Walking slowly  
In the violet blue  
Of summer twilight coming on

The streets are shadows full  
Of dust and shadows  
Down the empty street far down  
A woman tosses her black hair

The shadows toss and flutter  
On the sidewalk and I see  
The shadow world is full  
Of tree-caught wind the windy trees

I move on drift on silently  
Over the sidewalks broken by  
Cracked into jagged pieces by  
The shadow quakes of shadow earth

By powers of the drawing moon  
So white and white  
And white and white  
The night is silent in the moon

The street becomes the moon itself  
Its face is full of moving trees  
The woeful trees the ragged tossing  
Summer trees the summer trees

They're black as charcoal  
Dripping char dust  
Breezes stirring ash on ash  
The boughs above me are bone grey

They're bone grey in the sick  
Street light then tendons  
And black arteries and leaves  
Of charred flesh napalm fire

The woman watches from the tree  
She watches as I walk along  
I drift on silently and see  
She has one son and many sons

The woman watches  
From the tree  
She has one tree it's hers alone  
She watches and her eyes are gold

Her eyes are gold  
Her hair is black like  
Paper burnt it's dull  
Black like a scorpion

She's watching as we walk  
Along and drift and fall  
And walking drift through  
Streets of ash face of the moon

## **Amor**

Night of the flowering jasmine  
And a thousand fireflies,  
Each firefly a thought  
The night will think just once.

Inconsolable therefore  
The ceaseless waters of the spring  
In which the chalk moon shines  
Like shimmering black oil.

The garden and the walk  
Are empty now, and only we  
Are heard by night's wide open ear,  
The night is still to listen as we speak.

Everything we do is seen  
By night's wide eye, a single pupil  
Velvet and hypnotic black  
And wide as the entire sky.

All this just fills our  
Solitude more deeply. The night's  
Vast eye is our own sight  
Made wider, deeper by desire,

The night's ear our avidity  
To hear just our two selves.  
They're my desire to hear, to see  
Just you and only you,

And your desire likewise  
To be with only me;  
Even a thousand fireflies  
Are somehow yours and mine.

The grass is full of dampness,  
And the garden sleeps tonight  
Untouched by breeze. I listen  
For your silence. Speak it now.

## Berceuse

It's noon. The yellow light  
Makes slivers and ruled lines  
Around the dark beige curtains  
And the lowered blinds.

The light's a smoldering of dust  
Dropped through the browns of shade  
And shadow in the quiet room.  
The curtains are like folded wings.

Your closed eyes, too,  
Are folded wings. You lie  
Upon your side, your arms  
Crossed loosely, and your legs.

Your arms are still,  
And your forgotten loves  
Are dead or dying there,  
And yet you live.

Your legs are crossed,  
Yet both our lives are almost  
Waking here and opening,  
Like flowers in the dark.

They're held here while you dream  
And listen to the silence  
And stray noise beyond the window,  
Somewhere in the other world.

They're held there  
In darkness and in stillness  
And in secrecy as well,  
Like two dice hidden in a cup,

Or like the day that waits  
Outside for us, like light  
That burns so bright outside  
For us, and yet does not.

### **After the Rain**

It was a summer night whose rain had passed.  
The night awakening, and  
Pores of the dripping leaves, the grass, the soil,  
Soaked branches of the trees,  
The million eyes that watch  
Beneath the epidermal surface of the night were now  
awakening.

A million mouths were opening:  
Whispering of many whisperings.  
The rain had wet the rough bark of the tree.  
Inhale the total hush of after-storm.  
Exhale the final moment of the world.  
Inhale it all to start it all again.

## Summer Storm Under the Tree

The night is full of rain smells  
And earth smells.

The rain is simmering,  
Whispering its whisperings –  
Cool shivers of warm rain and gusts of wind.

The droplets patter  
And sift through the leaf-crown.

Then come roof-leakings of more rain,  
Threads,  
Plumb lines of water,  
Then streams  
And larger streams  
And misty drenchings, and finally  
The whole tree's wet and swaying in the storm.

The tree  
Is like a tongue that tastes the rainy air.  
The rain runs down the bark of the tree's trunk,  
And the tree surges  
In a gust and reaches  
Shivering up into the night.

## Northern Hills

The sun above the hushed and burning hills...

Domes of the silos flash in midday heat.  
Against the distant yellow-green hay field  
A bright green tractor is an aphid on a leaf.

I walk along the side of the highway.  
The air above the melting asphalt strip  
Quivers vividly like high octane fumes.

Farms cluster on the northern New York hills,  
Hills cut and broken by their smooth highways  
Or crossed by patched and rough macadam roads

Where loose stones spatter the car's underside,  
Where blackberry and burdock choke the ditch  
And cabbage whites in dreaming pasture air

Float in the bright sun. The upland lot  
Is full of boulders and crab apple trees  
And bounded with a rusted wire fence.

There on a listing gray fence post – rain-gnawed,  
With moss along one side – a paper sign,  
Yellow and rain-spotted, stiff and parchment-warped,

Informs you Private Property. Keep Out.

## To Evening

It is the end of summer and the end of day.  
The sun is spreading to a pool of mercurochrome  
Among the cornfields beyond the far macadam road.

The hills are turning bronze.  
Black swallows are crossing  
And re-crossing in their realms of gold.

Up beyond my window the sky is purpling,  
The air subdued to an evening quiet.  
A horned beetle is caught in an angle of late sun.

My open window  
Is an ear  
Cocked to listen for the burning  
And thundering of sunset.

Yet all is still.

Silence is silence now.

All things are trying to speak,  
And some things most of all.

Why the ivy, darkening in light?  
Why the glistening birch tree with its web?  
Why the mirror-flash of gold from other windows?

The world is not what we see.  
It is another thing.

I have heard, I have seen, I have felt.

I know many things.  
Yet I do not know what I know.

## **Binghamton Suite**

### **I**

Binghamton, rain-grey and moody town,  
Your streets are crossed by rivers.  
You are set among the southern New York hills.

The rainy wind  
Blows through Binghamton.

Your quiet side streets  
Named for German poets and composers.  
The Appalachian hills are all around,  
Holding up the blue exalted sky.

I've walked your streets at night  
And stood on grassy back roads  
Just outside of town.  
On city maps I've noted there and there.  
How many loves were found and lost, all here.

The rainy wind  
Blows through Binghamton.

## II

The bush's dark green delicate  
And aromatic needles  
From which drip these drops of rain,  
Clear rain.  
How precise, how beautiful.  
One drop and then another.

To such a moment I have brought my sadness.

Each drop depending from the needle's tip  
To form a bead of rain.

To such a moment I've come.

## III

Binghamton, your rooms of quiet  
And your high white porticos.

Only the finest houses here.

Flowering gardens, tool sheds  
And glass hot houses too.

Only the finest houses here.

Your ancient elegance: fine moldings,  
Ornamented porches like brocade.

Only the finest houses here.

City of parlors, that's what you were called.  
City of parlors, but now long ago.

Only the finest houses here.

#### IV

The arches, the dark archers  
Came nearer to Seville.

The open Guadalquivir.

They came with broad grey hats  
And with their long slow capes.

Ah, the Guadalquivir.

They came from distant regions,  
Those of pain and sorrow.

The open Guadalquivir.

They enter the dark labyrinth  
Of love, of crystal, and of stone.

## V

At night on wet side streets,  
Rainy orchards, groves.

Two rivers become one.

In rainy autumn fields,  
Smell of rotting leaves.

Two rivers become one.

They come from far away,  
The rain and the roots of trees.

Two rivers become one.

My love and I are walking,  
Yet it is very late.

Two rivers become one.

Hiss of the cold night wind.  
Black branches cage the moon.

Two rivers become one.

Surge of the cold night wind,  
And the moon is flowing on.

Two rivers become one.

## VI

The lighted candle in my room,  
Flame-tattered in the breeze.

On one wall two shadows  
That quiver up and swell.

And then she whispers for me  
To put the candle out.

## VII

I go to the open window  
And look out. Listening.

Crickets and more crickets.

Now in the neighborhood  
Everyone is sleeping.

The scent of lilacs  
Is in the breeze.

## VIII

There is dew  
On the black lilac leaves.

The breeze moves  
Among the white peonies.

In a cut of moonlight  
Grey petals in the grass.

The rest of the lawn  
Is all black.

There are fireflies around me  
Like sparks in the night.

## IX

This paper lantern is hung  
In the dimming arbor here.

It's like an enormous poppy  
Constructed of paper and wire.

Its pistil-like candle burns  
And gives a soft orange light.

Its paper skin is dry and stiff  
Yet very warm to the touch.

It hangs here. In the dark  
It seems to float weightlessly.

The orange light it gives  
Is unlike a jack o'lantern's.

Although they share one color.  
For this is summer. It's still summer.

## **X**

Past midnight  
The house is silent.

Dry leaves scraping and rustling.  
They sound like sand pouring down.

Branch shadows  
Are fractures in the sidewalk.

The moon is very bright  
And the wind is cool.

In the hedge  
There are only a few crickets.

## **XI**

Was I asleep?

Across my bed  
Cold wind.

The shadows  
Of oak leaves and branches

Waver and flutter  
On the bedroom floor.

## XII

It's Saturday, and after we've had tea  
She asks me what I'm planning, if I'm free.  
The farmer's market? Yes, it's after ten.  
The market will be there, set up again.

She knows I like a brisk walk, and it's fall.  
The sun is shining, yet she takes her shawl  
And wraps it around herself, fastened at the waist  
With an old rope belt. The two of us make haste.

The air is bright with autumn, cool and clear,  
The leaves not fully turned yet, although here  
And there a splash of gold, burnt orange, or red  
Catches the sun. The auburn on her head

Is no more striking, though more beautiful:  
With red of fire and brown of earth it's like her soul.  
It's like her soul, like my soul, like the farmers' too.  
We look through fruits and vegetables. The sky

Above the courthouse dome is bright, bright blue.

### **XIII**

Woman of orchards  
Of cymbidium perfume

So many

Woman of the fields  
Wild flowers tall dry grass

So few

Woman of honeysuckle  
Black water from the river

So many

Woman of river earth  
And of black leaves in the moon

So few

Woman of sun-rivers  
Our reflections streaming light

So many

Woman of burning hollyhocks  
Gladiolas roses

So many

Woman of cemetery angels  
Fastened in winter ice

So few

Woman of water, earth  
And air, earth-woman

I will come back

## XIV

Midsummer rain  
Is falling on green fields,  
On the nickel roofs of houses,  
On the grey unpainted barns  
And on the red barn too.

It falls  
On dark green fields  
And on the lighter green.  
It falls on yellow fields  
And on the black unplanted earth.

I've watched it fall  
For half an hour or more,  
Standing in my doorway here.  
The fields and low hills go on  
As far as I can see.

This is the hour  
When everything I see  
Is what I want to see –  
The rain, the rich green land,  
The houses and the farms.

## XV

In the morning when she rises  
She stretches out her arms.  
Her hair is tousled still,  
And she looks at me and smiles.

Her hair and blue night gown  
As she bends  
To tuck the corner  
Of the white and wrinkled sheet  
Are caught in honeycombs of yellow morning light  
Breaking in dusty silence  
Through the leaded window panes.

Four rooms with wooden floors.  
Four rooms, and for a while

We live in this old house.

## Letters from the North Country

### I

It is evening here in the small farming town.

I can hear the crickets outside.  
From my bedroom window  
I see the hills along Route 81.

I'd like to have some binoculars;  
I could spy on the farmers nearby  
While they're out at their work.  
Maybe I'll buy a pair.

### II

There must be a small chink in the screens,  
Every so often some insect gets in.

And last night a moth,  
A large and dark brown, rather velvety moth,  
Appeared in my bedroom  
While I was reading.

The night was entirely silent.

I could hear the purr of its wings  
And the papery, chitinous sound

As it knocked from one wall to the next.  
I have to confess  
That I wanted to smash it. I tried.  
But it flitted so tremulously about  
That it upset my timing. I missed.

Then I couldn't see where it went,  
Although I was somehow certain  
It had gone behind the closet door  
And was in among the pile of shoes there.  
I looked, but I couldn't find it.

Very dangerous to sleep with a moth  
In your room, I thought.  
They use up a lot of oxygen.  
You might never wake up.  
Or wake up as a moth.

Or would you perhaps  
Be a moth who had dreamed  
That it was a man  
(Or in your case a woman)  
And was just then coming back to its senses?

### III

And then this afternoon  
There was a bee in the kitchen.  
I swatted it with a towel.  
It was unfazed.

I got a thicker cloth bath towel.  
Caught it. Enveloped it. Crushed it.  
But since it was somewhere  
In the layers of the towel  
I couldn't be sure.  
Sometimes bees are quite tough.

So I quickly opened the freezer  
And threw the whole thing inside –  
Bee, towel, and all.  
If it didn't get crushed, it'll freeze.

On that note I'll leave you.  
It's evening, the light is dim now,  
And the paper is going grey.  
I can't see to write anymore.

I would turn the light on,  
But who knows what that might attract.

## IV

I live across the street from a church,  
The Inter-Faith Chapel.  
A non-denominational prayer hall.

They make a great deal of noise –  
Hammering, drilling, sawing.  
They have a mania for improvements.

The grass was just turning green  
When they had a girl out there mowing it.  
I thought, why don't they let it grow a bit first?  
It must be against their collective religion.

Now evening light, only a moment ago,  
Made the off-white shingles of the ordinary house  
across the street  
Burn softly. The shingles themselves are bone grey.

But now, already, just since I began writing this,  
The light is softer, diffused,  
The color receded and cooled.

And the shadow of a telephone pole  
That cuts one roof-side at an angle  
Is less distinct now, blurred at the edges.  
The roof itself, made of shingles, some pink and some  
nearly white,  
Is plum red in its wash of evening sun.  
The slanting light over all floods the whole valley,  
Floods the town and this street, and this roof as well  
And makes tiny sparklings of light across its surface.

## V

The Inter-faith Chapel is made of red brick.  
The shadow of the telephone pole  
Tilts a black bar across its facade.

A moment ago I realized  
The telephone wire apparatus at the top –  
A few horizontal bars  
And things that look like flashlights  
Attached to humming coils like shock absorbers on a  
car –

All this with its dark wires and spiky fastenings  
Casts a shadow  
Like a brambly-looking crown of thorns  
Across the blue slate roof.

## VI

It's still broad day, but there are differences.  
The light is warmer still, and yet no longer bright:  
Premonitions of the gathering sunset  
Still two hours away. The air is quieter.

Along the distant hills, Route 81  
Runs like an invisible wire  
Along which tiny colored beads  
Are slowly pushed, as slow as egg white pours.  
The larger beads, the 18 wheelers,  
Are distinctly white, the smaller ones barely visible.

Yet now I see a smaller one  
Just entering the flaking, shimmering green  
Of a young maple tree,  
Pursued through leaves and branches  
By the larger white one on its tail.

The color of the air has dimmed.  
I'll stop for now.

## VII

I'm looking out the window  
And the day is hot and bright.  
The sky above the hills is a pale and whited blue.  
From my room here on the hill I see,  
Among the trees and scattered rooftops of the town  
A windshield or a window or aluminum roof-flashing  
Now glittering in the sun.  
The light makes every object burn or shine or spark.  
It's as though the world were made  
Of tiny, infinitesimal points –  
Of a something, of a nothing,  
Burning and sparkling in our eyes.

The day, the air, the time  
Is full of bright confusions holding quiet:  
Floss from the cottonwood afloat bright air,  
Dandelion seeds that cross the light,  
Bright blue and blue-green flies, and bumblebees...  
The light not hard, but warm and rich,  
Is bathing the entire valley.  
The air is full of scintillating life.

The sky itself is absolutely clear.  
There are no clouds at all.  
Across the street the chapel's roof  
Is burning in the sun and almost glows  
A bright slate-blue, a bright cornflower blue.

The telephone pole with its wire crown of thorns  
Has only a small shadow at its foot.  
The concrete sidewalk burns as white as quartz.  
A man in an electric blue tee shirt  
Sits on the chapel's steps.

And sounds are in the air:  
A lawn mower, someone hammering a board,  
Next door there are children playing.

Yet the light itself is silent,  
Motionless, and warm.

Who knows what it is for something to exist?  
The summer brings this question too,  
When the world so clearly burns before our eyes.

You are the only one I'd write to in this way.  
Only you would be interested.

## VIII

You enter the pasture through a metal gate near the barn  
which marks it off from the farm yard.

On the side near the road, where I stand, it is fenced off  
with wire.

The pasture divides in the middle – a low hump of land  
runs in a gradual arc from the nearby maple wood to  
a point on the far side of the barn.

Stretched out along this line stand thirty large oak trees,  
each one with several trunks rising and twisting  
outward from a low central stump.

The trunks are contorted and crooked and grow outward as  
much as up, some very close to the ground.

There are great gaps between them where the orange sunset  
shows between dark green leaf-crowns which look  
as though worn askew.

There are eight cows in the pasture, they stand with their  
heads down, grazing.

All are spotted and splotched, some black on white and  
others the reverse.

They do not stand together but are spread out, each by  
itself, along the line of trees. There is one white cow  
among them.

As the evening darkens the sky is an amber-red and peach  
glow beyond the black outline of tree tops. Against  
the sunset they're the color of wrought iron.

Slowly it dims to a dusk of ruddy brown. The air itself  
turns amber and pink.

The grass is grey like faintly luminous graphite, the  
shadows like wetted ash.

The cows become vague masses except for the one white  
cow which glimmers pewter grey and looks  
somehow more distant than the rest.

There's a small pond near the barn, although it can't be seen  
from here.

For a second there's the sound of water splashing – most  
likely geese spreading and fluttering before they  
settle down along the bank.

The grass has an end-of-evening smell. Standing in the  
thick black clover and alfalfa growing by the wire  
fence, I feel the dampness of the field. The air is  
slightly chill.

This is the heart of the North Country. It is late summer and  
almost night.

## A Field

Here

Where the odor of the summer's hay  
Comes in the passing breeze  
Moving the stillness of the summer noon,  
The scent of fields standing still uncut,  
And where the grass and tall weeds  
Tangle in themselves, the field  
Strewn with scattered wild flowers –  
Yellow-gold of black-eyed Susan,  
Blue of chicory and aster, the white of Queen Anne's lace –  
And where the air  
Is shimmering watery in midday heat  
And small white butterflies,  
The cabbage whites, float  
In the burning  
And sustaining atmosphere,  
Here where the whole field wavers and ripples  
In just-held silence,  
A thousand rumors  
Hushed from breeze to breeze,  
In sunny vacant loneliness  
When no one's here  
Or only I am here,  
A spirit simmers,  
Whisper of earth-born growth  
Amid the secrecy of smallest things:  
The black ant in its world,

The green wedge of the green tree hopper,  
Smokey wings of the cicadas  
And their constant hum,  
The aphid and the lace bug  
And bright horse flies of indigo and metal green,  
The tree bark colored spider  
In its hollow-of-gauze web,  
The breaths of many breathings  
Of sun-risen, sun-tormented grass  
That wavers, staggered  
With the sweetness of the air and steady light  
And tangles downward deeper  
Trying to draw the earth up toward the sun;  
Amid the still-unnoticed world,  
The irreplaceable  
Confusion rioting silently  
In light-filled peace,  
Trembling on the point  
Of shattering to become a thousand worlds,  
Here, held in secret,  
Burning in their fury, hidden  
Among smallest things,  
The powers have remained themselves.

## Early Morning, Dry Summer

Rushing and sibilant sounds  
Like fine sand being poured  
Sound in the midst of sleep.

Paper and dust blown through the street,  
Tumbling sheets of newspaper  
And a fine grey-white dust.

A prickling dawn wind  
Pours through the agitated trees,  
Black trees against the amber dawn.

Their shadows reach out steeply  
On the lawn where the brown grass  
Is henna in the early light.

The white sheet turns to gray.  
Then glowing slats are dust-gray  
And pale blue with white incisions.

Thin wires of mercurochrome light  
Array the gradus of the blinds.  
The gills of light open up still more.

The sun comes through to us  
And the room grows into day.  
She sleeps, but not entirely,

Her eyelids tremulous at light  
That steals past their shade  
To softly search and lightly touch,

Her breath as light as moths.  
Yet still she lies so heavily  
Beside me here, though in

Just-found substantiality  
Grows slowly light, like everything,  
Grows free of dreams, of any dream.

The world grows free of night  
Around us now, both new and old.  
We know it just-perceptibly renewed,

The smallest change, yet everything,  
The opening of day's blue eye,  
And I rise now glad to rise.

## **The Dream**

It was a twilit field  
And as we looked around –  
A cobalt sky above,  
Brown grass beneath our feet –  
We saw a strange light opening,  
Burning without heat  
Or none that we could feel  
And without sound.

It was a noble blue  
Or blue-green light,  
Although from where it came  
We couldn't say.  
Was it the morning  
Or the end of day?  
Which way was the sky  
More definitely bright?

Then radiating waves  
Changed the sky,  
Translucent yellow haloed  
With a faintest green bled out  
To stain the nearest edges  
Of that celestial route  
A thousand tiny stars  
Had already spread through.

But we were waiting  
For the sun. It came.  
And while we waited  
Watching the horizon,  
Sensing somehow  
Something had begun,  
It startled us above  
Like a sudden scream.

It was a leprous wafer  
Or a small dull coin,  
Dime-sized and haloed  
With a misty white  
Much like a winter sun,  
A dim and chalky light  
That could not actually  
Be said to shine.

And then we felt a cold  
Creep into us,  
Rising from the ground  
Like late fall mist,  
Coating the stiff grass  
With smoky frost.  
Our feet grew cold, then numb,  
And then useless.

They felt as dead  
As wads of cotton gauze,  
So that we moved on stumps,  
Then ceased to bother,  
But tried to brush the ice flakes  
From each other,  
Our hands as  
Inarticulate as paws.

We blundered at pant legs,  
At shirt, lapel, and hair –  
Even my face  
Felt paralyzed with cold,  
I seemed to drool my words  
Out like some old  
And half-demented,  
Half-drunk pensioner.

And then I had  
A ringing in my head  
And couldn't hear your shout,  
Then couldn't speak,  
Since I had grown  
Gradually more weak.  
Your eyes were glittering  
Now that I was dead.

And then the sun came up  
Again, though now  
It was a pock marked  
Huge mithraic eye  
Hung like a giant moon  
In the empty sky  
Above a brilliant field  
Of ice and snow.

At last – who knows  
How long we had to wait? –  
A cloud of monarch  
Butterflies appeared.  
Delicately paper-light,  
They decorously paired,  
Flitted and arabesqued  
Unpairing, then alighted.

Dye-stuff like white flour,  
Each wing a huge snowflake –  
How incredible, they were  
Completely white,  
And when I saw,  
I felt the coming night  
And started dreaming,  
Dreaming of which route to take.

## Old Man in the Garden

### I

At just past dawn in summer when the sun  
Just barely shows red in the opposite field's trees  
He's there already working in the garden,  
Bringing manure or down on hands and knees  
Transplanting peppers from the small hotbed  
Where they had recently begun to grow,  
Or bracing pole beans in a straighter row  
With sticks and twine, or rummaging the shed  
For sprinkler nozzle or the watering can –  
These tools the emblems of his waiting care  
That for so long can watch and labor where  
Now he bends to scoop the garden's soil with  
Dirt-marked hands, his measure a hand's span,  
His old hand pressed against the cool damp ground.

## II

“You know one time what happen?” We were out  
In back one summer afternoon and he  
Was telling stories of his friends. “Oh yeah,”  
He said when old man Leone next door came up,  
“He getting old...I think maybe the gout.  
He like to drink a lot sometime, you know,  
Until his wife one day she make him stop.  
One time I’m in the garden, near the peas,  
Working in there, on my hands and knees  
And all at once I hear...something...a noise...  
Somebody calling? yelling? who knows what....  
I climb the fence and run and find him there,  
He fall head first into his own hotbed.  
‘Mother of god, he had a stroke, I thought.’  
And so I said, I yell to him, ‘Joe, Joe,  
Try to move your arms and legs a little bit.’  
But then it turn out, no, just too much beer.  
He fall right in. Good thing he don’t break his head.”

### III

The two of us were out behind the garage one day  
To see about the berries that grew there,  
Our blackberries that looked a bit less each year,  
He just returned from his maintenance job for the day,  
I from whatever fooling around I'd been into.

"Not too many this year," he said and took

A single branch in his hand. "See, look..."

"See how these flowers?" He fingered them.

"Look how few."

The delicate white blossoms that had been

So thick in even my recall now grew

More sparse and scattered. "I remember one

Time it was all covered here...all full of these."

He stood there silent for a moment, then

Went about inspecting those too-few

Full branches, humming to himself, just like the bees.

## **An Early Memory**

One night, almost asleep,  
In the retrospective and prophetic  
Drift that's not quite dream  
And yet no longer waking thought,

I saw an enclosed space  
Of total silence, perfect stillness, vacancy –  
The light in frosted, leaded panes  
Coming from nowhere, going nowhere, blank,

Dust now, merely, in the corners.  
This is eternity, I thought,  
The mythical consummation  
Promised to hope and faith.

It passed me on my way to sleep –  
A brief glimpse not a glimpse  
But like a point of phosphorescence  
In the engulfing stream.

Dream-drifting, eyes closed, night-mind:  
It was like water and it flashed  
Right through me – an electric pulse,  
Mirror-shimmer of light, quick match flare.

What was it, really?  
And then I realized: it was  
An alcove somewhere in  
The parish church where I grew up.

Somewhere in the steeple?  
A small spot off the back staircase  
Leading to the organ loft? a tiny  
Disused room somewhere?

An alcove or a room closed off  
Who knows? *You cannot*  
*Know this. It's not possible*  
*To know it, nor will it ever be.*

I drifted near to sleep again,  
But then awoke. I realized  
That instant – half-incredulous –  
I'd always known that room.

I'd always had that memory  
Which yet I'd never known  
Until that moment past –  
And yet had always known:

Something un-recollected  
And unfelt, unseen,  
Yet shifting like a light  
Behind each memory,

Each feeling, every motive of enjoyment,  
And every recollective cell  
Of ear's responsiveness  
Or eye's discrimination.

Everything spoke to this  
Or issued somehow from it,  
Dimmed it in secret  
Or breathed on it like a coal.

Startled, I remembered now:  
I realized at once  
How much of all I'd felt  
Had echoed that one memory,

Had been directed by  
That small, obscure, partly imagined place,  
Or, less than that, by its image  
And its primitive feel recalled.

For one brief instant  
It all was infinitely sad,  
Heartbreaking, terrible:  
I saw the smallness of our life.

It was disquieting to think  
Of that plain empty space –  
Not made for anyone  
To sit or stand or walk in,

Made only to be empty  
For the saint – no longer there –  
To stand in forever,  
Motionless, in silence,

Perfectly still, in perfect quiet,  
Gathering dust in emptiness,  
At the vanishing point of memory,  
In the non-duration of past time.

The vacant room is  
Like a photograph.  
No sound can come from it  
Or like music un-played,

Thunder of silence echoing  
Throughout all time and space,  
Throughout the universe,  
In Watertown, New York,

In the United States,  
In 1964: the saint's one hand  
Raised forever in benediction  
Though never lowered

To the suppliant's brow,  
For the illusory hand  
I almost see in memory,  
The place I almost can recall,

Was gone before my time.  
How terrible that space, though –  
Empty, absolutely so,  
More so than any other.

It is no ordinary place –  
Made to hold nothing  
And be nothing's home;  
No purpose, no utility,

No love or pain, regret  
Or laughter, suffering,  
Joy or pleasure, the whisper  
Of sex, the pulse of self,

The knot of self-awareness –  
All these were never  
Thought of here – irrelevant –  
In connection with this empty room.

Nothing is here but light  
And time – nothing,  
And space – nothing,  
And now, by chance and disobedience,

My gaze. How strange,  
How palpably haunted  
Is the dusty light, the perfectly  
Empty plenitude of light

On plaster walls,  
On wooden wainscot,  
On the pedestal, the frosted  
Glass, the window sills.

At night only the dark is here,  
Perhaps the moon, and then  
With dawn a glaze of light,  
A dusty lilac, blue, or violet gray,

Then orange, and then declarative  
Clear light colorless and steady,  
And then the day is present  
Although never really here,

If day is something like  
A context for activity,  
Perhaps a joyful context, and assent.  
Here day is neither ascension

Nor assent. It is just time.  
Then light grows dimmer,  
Slips down obliquely  
Into sunset, dusk, and night.

This happens every day  
And every night –over and over,  
Again and again, with no change  
And without incident.

That's all that happens here,  
Though dust will settle sometimes,  
Yet that's all there is – nothing,  
An exhalation on the mirror's glass,

Dust the exoskeleton of time,  
Its leavings and empty trace –  
That's all that ever claims existence here,  
In this sun-haunted void,

This place that's not imagined, actual,  
Actually made and planned,  
Constructed as a shrine  
To just this light's

Indifference, this dust's  
Absence of memorial,  
This absence of ourselves  
That we have placed here

And contrived to give  
A place to in our memories –  
(Sooner or later everyone  
Must stumble on this place,

Is lured here by accident  
Not accident, by disobedience  
And stealth entirely foreseen  
And planned for all along),

A place designed to be recalled,  
Fully itself in recollection only  
And then just briefly, fleetingly –  
Barely a memory, on the edge of sleep.

### **The Body in the Mirror**

**Y**ou stop to see your image in the mirror  
In which you look and see yourself a thing,  
And see your body merely standing there,  
Or as a single water drop of being.

How can you ever think of what this is?  
As within its passing it appears  
Such as it has to be, for even this  
Must be and even move as the past years

Within itself have given it to do  
Among the images it is and was.  
It can and cannot live; yet this is you.

Like everything it's clearly what it does.  
And is there nothing else? Heard and felt inside  
The moving image which its images hide?

## **I Advance Masked**

A door –

And we negotiate the half-lit corridor:  
Red light, beige shadows, and the lamps for this occasion  
Hung with crepe, a context at first beautifully familiar  
And then, like any other, progressively less so.

And so it is for all these others in the room,  
As I advance masked. The party  
Has been waiting and continues to do so.  
How odd the body in this circumstance,  
And reaching for that swift intensity  
As it disappears.

Until that time when each will stand enveloped  
In the fire they are intent on summoning  
Or vertigo entices the foot beyond the window's ledge,  
The next best thing is talk, this talk that is like  
Turbulent agitated water rising in its narrow strait  
And then boiling away,  
While each one stands beneath and listens  
Under bridges of silence.

So after a certain time I strayed away  
To find myself an armchair in some totally dark corner,  
An alcove recessed from the activity,  
A place that one might use to find one's thoughts,  
The thought that must be there, the power biding there  
Though like the deepest bass note of some music  
Felt and yet not heard.

How wonderful such secrecy can be  
As in a sort of rapture of attention  
One first sees something, anything – the foliate wallpaper,  
The flowers in the carpet, anything – and that  
Attention open outward like the widening aperture of fire  
Burned by the burning glass, and burns through everything:  
One sees, and then steps through. You cannot be the same.  
They cannot be the same – these others  
Moving through the shadows, shadows themselves  
In their forest of chrome-blue cigarette smoke.

When they have fallen in the fires that harass them,  
You'll not have fallen too – beneath the table  
Or beneath the dream. You will have made  
An origin, a fountain scattering gold light, a gold  
Thread of peculiar strength, a well receiving pebbles or the  
moon.

And those intensities  
One must endure, though agonized perhaps,  
Will be just the preliminary form  
Of that negative splendor, gold and disembodied.

## To a Friend Intensely Grieving

What can I say to you, now that your heart and mind have fallen into such a darkness?

I want you to come back within that circle that we make here for ourselves, carve out perhaps, or burn – our happiness: an image to make do, it cannot be so intimate as pain.

And you who know already everything about the world called *life*, *experience*, or *things*, cannot be merely charmed or tricked.

I know this, but I don't speak for the world, nor speak for life, experience, or things, and won't speak the word *happiness* again.

But I will speak of you yourself, your absolute unsponsored presence in a room, or standing for a moment in the door, a quality like grace possessed and lived, or the suggestion of some warmth and light.

These themselves are from you, they only live with you, are you, the beauty of yourself, your very self – not goodness, only beauty, living strength proceeding from the mystery of self, a self so absolutely free of everything, of all involvements with the world, the past, the future, free too of its fallen self, that it must bear its solitary beauty like a kind of trial in that emptiness.

This is the human task and beauty, perhaps a kind of extremity in life. But think perhaps it is our life of life, of greater worth than any life or death.

And so at last you are your only burden and at last your only strength.

## Winter Morning, Traces

Do not rush. Do not grasp. Open.

Winter morning. The snow, in grey light, is lavender on the roofs of the houses nearby. My bathroom window is open. A fir tree stands in the yard next door with its chevrons of snow. Suddenly a crow flaps heavily in the topmost boughs, shaking down blue dustings of snow. How soon the morning has started.

It is just as I thought when I was young: at dawn the roofs of the houses are nothing if not a map of desire.

I stand at the bathroom mirror. The hot water rushes from the tap with the force of an arrow. The steam rises.

The mirror grows foggy and damp. My face is hard to discern, misted over, as though from someone's heavy breathing on the glass. Soon I can no longer see it.

This morning I notice that my face is the same, and yet different. (Does one really notice these differences or are they imagined?)

Every morning your face looks the same, although it may have changed subtly. Then what of the face beneath that one, and the one beneath that?

## The Old Town, Good Friday

Tonight a simmer of spring rain –  
The faltering spring come back again.  
It's Easter time, Passover time,  
When Jews and Christians celebrate  
The early spring they consecrate  
To mysteries of deliverance.  
Yet spring will not deliver them  
However hopeful their observance.

How to consecrate the self? pain  
Its deepest principle, the stain  
Which cannot be rinsed out with blood.  
Blood is its nature and selfhood;  
Therefore I listen to the rain  
Which constantly considers pain.  
I listen to the rain come down  
Falling in darkness on the still town.

What does it tell? One thing,  
Though it can neither speak nor sing  
Its revelation, yet calls forth  
A long-to-be-acknowledged truth  
In you yourself; you cannot choose  
But hear its soft inquiring voice –  
*Sleep is good. Is death better still?*  
*Unnamed, unborn the best of all?*

I listen to the rain come down  
Falling in darkness on the still town.

## The Suicide

And with all speech  
Now dead  
I lie here at the edge of sleep  
Beneath the barely known and undepicted  
Elusive  
Darkness of the night –  
No end and no beginning,  
The living and the dead of all the ages  
And the numberless dead worlds  
Crowding the dense  
But thinly known,  
The infinitely ramifying now so  
Vacantly populated  
Night.

How many others' thoughts  
Have entered here?  
Like tiny sand grains  
Down a well.  
How many where the barren wind  
Blows out  
The flickering and low-burnt candle light?  
And now two staring eyes,  
Two groping hands,  
The just apparent breath,  
The liminal, the nominally  
Real.

Now come all star-filled spaces  
At the edges of the dark.  
I say farewell to them.  
I turn to feel the earth,  
Its faintest grass with my two feet, the scent of rain,  
The touch of tangled roots,  
The crumble of black dirt, the memory  
Of worlds once known  
And lived.

I also say farewell to these.

The sin of non-awakening.  
Three flowers  
And the dead root of my hand  
Now given to the wind,  
Now thrown to the stream of night.  
A blind face in the dark  
Consenting to be blind.  
Blindness. Guilt.  
Blindness.

I could not love my life.

## Sleepwalking

They speak of growing older, but  
No one is ever old, for the soul  
Is never old, it changes,  
But it never dies. The hours,  
The days, the nights, the years,  
The leaves of the calendars,  
The rags and rags of time,  
Pass over the soul and body  
And the body changes, for it has to change,  
But the soul can never change.

One sits and listens  
And the inmost part of you  
Is there and listens too –  
The movement of the world,  
The blank activity of life,  
The sounds of day, the startling silence of the night,  
The night wind through the black and heavy  
Ragged leaves, the night wind  
As it blows a scrap of old newspaper  
Down the empty silent street,  
Blue moonlight on the rain-wet asphalt's violet,  
The dust of moonshine on the tin-like street,  
The wavering webbing and deep shadow  
Of the overhanging leaves along the street  
And on the crazed cracks  
Of the sidewalk all in fragments  
Underneath you as, alone, you walk into the cobalt  
blue midnight.

I feel  
The night itself,  
I sense it all around me  
And inside of me.  
It's active, living,  
Moving all around us in the breeze,  
The air itself. You feel  
The night itself must feel its own presentiments.  
And then there are  
The veins of leaves, the shadows  
Of the veins of shadow-leaves,  
As you walk out farther toward your destination.

You feel the darkness all around you  
Holding that which is about to be.  
Yet it is placed there in the future,  
And we here in the past  
As though in some other world quite set apart.

## A Tale

I slept one night  
As rain came pounding,  
Pounding on the roof  
And slashing through the trees  
Like knives; and wind  
Was battering the house,  
Moving all over it and  
All around it, like  
A fire possessing it,  
Enveloping, pressing  
From all sides, as though  
A hand bore down  
And just forbore  
To crush it in,  
So that the house  
Was shaking loose,  
Shuddering free  
Of its foundations,  
To drift and float  
Unmoored, weightless,  
Like a cork  
On the slow swell  
Of the fields  
And hills around.

The wind was sneaking,  
Infiltrating, moving in  
And all around, within  
The dark closed rooms,  
The basement, the empty  
Bedrooms, and all along  
The dark hallways,

Smaller and larger  
Leakings, sudden drafts.

I slept and woke, and  
Slept and woke again,  
Awakened by the rain  
And sudden wind;  
And then I took  
No notice anymore  
And slept at last  
Until day came.

With morning I awoke.  
The sun was burning  
Hot along my face,  
And one side tingled,  
Tight and stiffened  
Mask-like, as though  
It had been baked  
Beneath dried mud.  
I couldn't speak.  
The worlds I'd dreamt  
Had vanished – dust serrations  
Through the blades of light,  
Which cut the drapes  
And bent along one wall.

The blades had particles  
Of steel-bright cilia  
Along their burning edge  
And burned from gold  
To copper and then iodine  
As the blue dusk came on.

My bed had turned  
To grass; the moon came  
With the night and hung  
Above me where I lay  
In a cold dark field.

I peered down through  
A ragged gouged-out hole,  
A semi-circle opening  
Cut into the earth;  
And there the moon  
Burned very full,  
Translucent, opal-white,  
A light-filled jellyfish  
Like the medusa.

The earthen hole  
Was windy, cavernous,  
And ragged at its edge;  
Tree roots hung like  
Dark brambles and  
Long black threads,  
Like beet root strands,  
Hung from cone-like  
Earthen stalactites.

Every now and then  
Some clods of dirt  
Would fall; the wind  
Blew everything away  
Into mile and miles  
Of empty space.

And then the moon  
Grew distant, gradually  
Receding, and I saw it  
Shrunken, tiny –  
A light disc at the far end  
Of an enormous tunnel  
Or a telescope  
Or the barrel of a gun.

It glowed intensely white  
And bright and  
Brighter still, the smaller  
That it grew – shrinking  
To a final diamond point  
Far at the end  
Of a narrow black steel tube.

As  
It was  
On the point  
Of vanishing entirely,  
The tunnel narrowing  
And narrowing – tighter, tighter,  
Tighter the whole time,  
A sudden glancing ray  
Let fall a thread of light,  
As when you see a star  
Through tear-blurred lashes,  
A passing streak of light,  
A filament  
Of moonlight  
That became my gaze,  
Transfixing me.

I awoke  
With the real sun  
Radiant and warm upon my chest.  
The curtains, light brown,  
Almost rust,  
Bright sunlight red and tawny  
Through the curtains' lantern shell.  
The room felt strangely fragile.  
I had forgotten  
All the wind and pounding rain.

My skin  
Drank in the sun,  
So hot and golden red.  
It was a jaguar  
Asleep upon my chest.  
A jaguar slept inside of me;  
I knew that I would  
Have to wake it soon.

And when I thought this,  
Instantly it woke  
And, rippling, moved:  
A shape dispersed among  
The curtains' bars of light.  
I rose and opened wide  
The curtains to the light  
And let the opened sun  
Wash over me. The day was  
Golden, warm, and bright,  
An autumn day. I stood there,  
Let the sun and morning air  
Come into me. I let the sun  
Come into me,  
Taking it on my arms  
And on my two bare outstretched hands.

## **Binghamton, Early Morning**

Autumn. A cold rain fell during the night,  
And now a dawn wind from the sun  
Disperses shale and slate-colored clouds.  
The hills that encircle the town  
Are reddish brown  
With the first light behind them.  
In the copper-colored dawn  
The street lights are a faint blue-gray.

Now the insomniac rises,  
The conscientious pre-med student  
Returns to the open book.  
The people on their way to General Electric  
At the edge of town  
Congregate at corner bus stops.

Downtown a sheet of old newspaper  
Billows for a second, then scrapes down  
Against the concrete wall of a bank,  
The wall is just now receiving  
A wash of pink light.  
Pigeons peck along the sidewalk  
Near trash cans and around benches  
Where alcoholics and drug addicts sit all day.

The first shift  
At the Arby's Roast Beef Sandwich place  
Unlocks the door. People – old ladies,  
A few old men, and a scattering of younger guys

Who won't be going anywhere –  
File in thinking of hot coffee.

The sun has risen a bit more.  
Its light has expanded, brightened,  
And shadows  
Are longer and sharper in the public square.

### **The Winter Fields**

I went out for a walk last night  
In mid-January's sterile cold.  
The cold made night more black and made  
The stars more sharp, cold points of light.

I thought of Yeats and of his dream  
Of a frigid hard geometry  
That worked the heavens and the earth  
And moved all lives inexorably.

The field I walked across still held  
Deep ruts where the November's mud  
Had flowed in rain then frozen hard,  
The frozen aftermath of flood.

And I looked up and saw the stars  
Scattered from the center of the sky.  
The earth lay sleeping as I watched.  
Snow filled the ruts that were like scars.

## **Burning Winter**

I walked out toward the frozen hill  
When night had reached an utter cold;  
The sky was clear, the moon was full  
And shining on the vacant world.

The cold was such I couldn't feel  
My hands or feet. The night was still,  
The snow had covered every hill,  
Far off the river shined like steel.

And when I reached the top I saw  
How truly frozen it all was,  
How much it would take to cause  
New life to start up or the old to thaw,

The world that burned beneath the snow  
To kindle in resurgent strength  
That living energy might flow  
And the earth stand revealed at length.

I saw four angels moving through  
The world as powers of desire,  
Laying bare the earth obscured in snow  
And false apocalyptic fire.

## **To an Old Friend Years Later**

No money here, but please accept some rhyme  
    As a token of my fond regard.  
I know it's nothing fancy and not hard  
    To understand. It's easy.  
        That's because  
    I wanted it to be  
    Just as you were and as I was,  
Not too concerned with any measure of time  
        And free.

If I recall, we took whatever impulse gave.  
    Whatever it was, that's what we had.  
And though we took a lot, it wasn't bad.

It seemed that we could have whatever we might choose.  
    We wagered on a lot, never afraid to lose.  
When all life was to spend, we never thought to save.

## To an Old Drinking Buddy

Here at (we'll say)  
The Triple Tun,  
as through the window –  
it's the end of day –  
the bright evening sun  
glitters in the foam of my ale,  
the circumstances  
bring to mind  
those times when  
we were pretty young  
and still quite hale  
and took our chances.  
Remember? Then  
everything we did  
was always right,  
always somehow  
in tune, body and mind.

By day or night,  
whether wrong or right,  
one way or another  
whatever we wanted  
to do, that's what we did.

Well things are certainly quite different now.  
Well, here's to you anyhow.

## **To An Old Girlfriend**

If I could think of you just once  
and not continue all day long –  
your amber nipples taut against my tongue,  
your cunt as wet as fifty cunts.

Even some slightest trivial thing –  
the way you combed your hair perhaps –  
will be enough to set me thinking, wondering,  
daydreaming with relapse upon relapse.

## **Ballad of Lost Places**

Andalusia when will I see  
Your rivers and your many streams,  
And when will I ever see  
Your fields of yellow grain?

Andalusia, and the heat  
Of my North Country hills –  
Where are the burning fields  
Where my steps must touch the earth?

Calabrian olive groves,  
Forgotten, remembered home,  
Calabrian midnight  
And the Tuscan dawn.

Bright Sicilian summer  
And black honey from the heat,  
The volcano sleeping  
In the roots of the carob tree.

O gardens of the Piedmont  
With your innocents unslain,  
How can your fountains flower  
Into my origins again?

Green olives and black honey,  
The gardens and carob trees,  
The Rome of my fathers' fathers  
And the virgin Roman spring.

Songs from the Provencal,  
And the singers voice is heard  
Unaccompanied and clear  
And forgotten in dead Provence.

Forgotten Provencal,  
Andalusian, Sicilian hills,  
Forgotten olive groves  
Of Calabria and Rome.

## CROSSING, EVENING LAND

### Asleep in the Spring Night

Breezes of the spring night flow  
Through the open window of the bedroom  
Where I fall toward deep  
And nearly dreamless sleep,  
Opening space beneath me with each breath –  
Exploratory, slow,  
Falling through circles widening still more  
Around the pebble of the I that falls  
As through the layers of the lidded eye,  
Ply after ply  
Stripped off and still no core  
But yet the voice and echo  
Of another I  
And the receding breath and heartbeat sounding near,  
Confused with something, infinitely far,  
I after I after I –  
As through a needle's eye  
Or through the opening outward of breath's open door.

Silence possesses me, and yet not death;  
Sources echoing through my fall.  
Do I touch the timeless and the time-filled both?  
--Systolic-dyastolic rhythm of the All.

Weightlessly burdened, free, unbound  
And bound within the circuit of my  
Breath and body and mind's eye,  
Listening, unconscious, filled,  
I touch the groundless hallowed ground –

A single drop of semen and the wind-striated  
Empty sea  
The audible trickle  
And dark water scent and chill  
Of small, small streams  
Run through the massed body of my rainy leaves and  
wet leaf-smell,  
And fainter and then fainter still,  
Too-real cries and screams and calls  
Come from a tiny recess in the dark receding wood.

And still  
The cool spring night is just one onward flow of breath.  
The silence is still silence,  
Yet not silence.  
How can I tear myself  
From this darkness?  
Though yet it is not here, and I not there.  
The sources run beneath me, sources and yet not.  
A strong gust takes possession now and batters  
At the night's four corners  
In the room where,  
Like a daytime cornered bat,  
My heartbeat  
Knocks and knocks against the dark walls,  
Wanting but not wanting to be let out.

## Waking Up

### Light

Has no age  
And neither does the night.  
I lie here with my head  
Beneath the open window,  
Glancing briefly at the clock beside my bed,  
And listen as the movements of the day  
In distant, soft, and random sounds  
Come through the sand-colored, sun-illuminated shade  
Which I've pulled up half-way.  
Cars pass down in the street.  
In the city, people go about their day,  
Following their devious  
Undeviating crooked paths,  
Becoming them,  
Darkly and predictably,  
Their movements tortuous  
And crazed  
And deviantly, rationally straight.

Yet in my room  
Now full of light  
And lilac-scented late spring air and, now,  
Within the quiet fury of this light,  
Becoming subtly  
More free,  
I feel and touch, desire  
And – opening – recall my own intelligence,  
Excitedly reflect on – breathe –  
And – knowing, certain –  
Feel the splendor of existence,  
Its freedom  
And sudden clarity.

Contained within  
These now-originating walls,  
This space that listens  
And the light that calls,  
I recognize my body, mind, and energy  
As living paths of these  
Unliving, never-to-be-touched  
Immensities.

Lying here, thinking,  
My face warmed by the sun  
That comes in here beneath  
The tapping shade still half-way down,  
I look up through  
The burning spaces of the bright spring day  
And its unearthly, startling blue.

I hear  
The movements  
Of the street  
Outside, like me  
Just recently released from night  
And likewise  
Certain to return to it –  
Out of the realm of time  
And into it again:  
The day, the night, the night, the day,  
A movement that itself must be  
Apart from and part of time.

Wondering,  
And feeling the sunlight  
Warm upon my skin,  
Seeing it with my now closed eyes,  
I stretch  
And open my arms out wide  
To take light in.  
And then I rise  
And pull the shade up all the way.

## At Midday

In the dimness of my room,  
Amid broad day,  
Thinking of those outside, and listening,  
I rose to open wide the doors of light.

And light fell inward  
Mapping the whole room,  
Its dust about the radiating pane –  
Particles of being, energy,  
Filling the awakened room's interior  
With bright external splendor.  
Light set its golden step  
Across the blonde oak floor.  
The room was visibly more real.  
I heard and felt, I glimpsed  
The secrets in the dial of the sun,  
Rapt and entangled in the filament  
That led – and held me captive –  
Through the labyrinth whose turnings  
Turn to darkness, whose center,  
Centerless, is visible radiance.

I saw two twining rivers of light  
With droplets, like beads of sweat,  
A golden trickle, like honey pouring,  
Ascending and descending,  
Twining around  
The gold chain from the sun –  
Oceanic shattering silence  
Pouring down, echoing  
Beyond the last listening  
And whispered rumor of thought-silence  
And the suddenly agonizing

Blueness of unearthly sky –  
As I, the absorbed,  
The quieted, the soon-to-be-extinguished,  
Watched and witnessed:

A burning like  
A burning cotton filament,  
Visible, invisible,  
Not hotter and not brighter  
Than the sun, though hot and bright,  
Finer than the finest hair,  
Real and unreal, hallucinated  
Tendrils of light-filaments,  
Fate-trellised, mortal-darkened,  
Dream ivy from the center point  
Of sun, climbing its dream lattice,  
With choruses of choiring voices  
Twining upward, slowly  
Rising, incessant, ringing  
In the silent noon, turning  
Inward and around and  
Downward to coil the still  
And mountainous weightlessness,  
The center-point of earth:  
A fine thread, infinite,  
Eternal, indestructible,  
Supporting the whole earth  
Yet finer than the finest blade of grass  
And frailer than a grass blade's whitest root.

Power and splendor of the task  
Of human life on earth –  
I knew this then, whatever else I knew,  
Mystery and splendor of our life on earth.

## **The Cornfield at Sunset**

The cornfield ripples and foams beneath  
The sunlight and evening wind,  
It is crossed with moving shadows  
From horizon to horizon.

In the declining light  
The swaying cornstalks are dark, almost burnt,  
And in the slanted rays of the sun  
Some are nearly black.  
The beards of corn silk  
Make sparks of copper  
In the red-orange glare.

Now the field's convex surface  
Is dented with bright wind-streaks.  
Shadow-fissures open and flow  
And then disperse  
As the green mass smoothes out again.

The windy surface ripples, the field-waves flake,  
The field cracking open in all directions,  
And then there are dark rows of the corn swaying  
With quick shadows among them.

In the deepened light  
The field ripples like a pelt.  
Shapes appear and disappear,  
Glimmering briefly  
In its ranks of waves.

Along the road a boy is riding his bicycle.  
He looks like a small black bead  
Against the orange light of mid-sunset  
That now is streaming outward  
From the setting sun.

Soon though it settles beyond the distant hills,  
Flattening and huge  
Amid its hem of burnt sticks.  
The intensity of light increases, darkening the world.  
The sky grows deeper, opening,  
Streaming with radiance – orange and opal and  
yellow-green,

And the distant hills are blackened as the air  
Is tinted with auroral light.  
The breeze picks up,  
Wind from the sunset  
Shivers the dark green blades.  
Flocks of crows  
Wheel and float above the field  
Like cinders from a fire.  
Cumulus clouds like luminous marble  
Amass and tatter and flow on  
Through areas of fiery orange,  
Bearing the streaming of mid-sunset's light  
In rays around their edges.

Suddenly,  
A crow rises from the field.  
Against the sun  
It loses outline and is gone – a flake of ash  
Blown from a fire aloft, fluttering  
To an incandescence and then  
Melting in the air.

What will the cornfield be  
Without fire,  
Beneath the nacre of the moon?  
--At night, when the wind  
Is full of empty space, and cold,  
As it blows through fields of corn  
As though through empty fields?

The cornfield ripples and foams beneath  
the sunlight and evening wind....

## Mothlight

It is late  
In the mid-summer night  
As we walk through the quiet side-streets.  
Indigo shadows fall over us,  
Silver and grey. Amber street lights.  
Dry millers the color of parchment  
In the spider's web,  
And the white moth takes wing.

Through the deep overhang  
Of the trees –  
Magnesium necklace of moon-shatter  
Sparkling beyond the leaf-scrim.  
As we pass through the arcade of maples,  
The stainless steel moon-flash  
Is distant above.

Through the leaf-doors  
Of the darkness, what is there?  
Beyond, where  
Dimensions of night-silence  
And bright loneliness stir.  
Wind-mixing of starry trees.  
Unearthly night scent.

And at some point – but when? –  
We move  
Through the mirror reflection  
Of the night-well's glimmering surface.

Choiring voices  
From trees ancient and common.  
Moonshine and graphite  
Of the bluish street,  
Shadow-corroded.

We hear  
The silence  
Of the blue midnight air.  
The nape of neck tingling  
Of the hemlock's scent,  
And the depths of grief hidden inside it,  
Tiny depths  
Leading inward and nowhere.

We breathe again, we breathe  
Again and again  
So deeply and deeply, for  
Where else could we be?  
Yet this world is never the world.

The eyes  
Of the moth's wings, dusty  
With the dust of earth.  
Black moths  
Collect in the realms  
Of the laden night trees  
That shiver and hush  
In the summer's embracing and low constellations.

Eyes in the bark watch  
As we tread the moon-ash  
Of the grove.

Time's ear is held close to the night.  
The night abides inside its listening.

A narrow space opens  
Where we walk with no path,  
Where all is in unceasing growth spilling onward,  
Tangling itself,  
Reaching inward and outward  
And down.

The silence  
Of night-space  
Breathes outward and out  
And falls back on itself –  
Around each tiny twig and black leaf,  
Every tree root  
And every white grub in the soil,  
The black ant on the bark,  
The amber moth's moon-possessed flight through the  
darkness.

## Ballad

On the old road from Chaumont  
I have met one walking, walking  
On the old road from Chaumont  
Across the parched green fields  
And the burning yellow fields  
I have met my own ghost walking

In the thick dust of the summer  
Soundless on the distant road  
Yellow on the moon-dust road  
In the blue florescent moonlight

With two hollow sockets for my eyes  
With a dry cicada's shell  
With a gourd of saw dust for a skull  
With a paper bag of saw dust

Many times the crickets rang,  
Over and over in the silence  
In the darkness of my mind  
(Never, never let them in!)  
All along the old macadam road,  
Blue and silver old macadam,  
Silver coins of moonlight rang

On the old road from Chaumont  
I have seen one walking, walking  
On the old road from Chaumont  
Over moonlit charcoal fields  
Over dust fields blown away  
I have met a young man walking

## **At the Point**

Beneath the road, the green and radiant sea.  
The water cracking open in the midday sun,  
All brightness beneath, constantly concealed  
With the melting wrinkled veils of white foam.

A day of perfect clarity: clear sunlight,  
Blue of the summer's sky, this place and time,  
Here where I watch these processes of day,  
The infinite geometries – water, air and light.

Standing here, beneath a high bright emptiness,  
The scent of water come up from the shore  
Is like a thought disclosed in every breath,  
The sheer event of life, of nameless existence.

And far below my foot the surf breaking in  
Breaks out in waves exploding into spray,  
Punishing the rock, breaking it down,  
Making the random beauty of the surf.

## The Evening Land

Stillness of the summer evening.  
The coolness of the air  
From the dimming flower beds  
And the watered ground, as the sun,  
Like a cry  
Dying far in the distance,  
Fades beyond the house roofs,  
Echoing only faintly  
In violet-stained air. Red and copper embers  
Cool beneath charred looking hills.

How dim the air is, how close,  
And how still. Slowly  
The evening grows silent.  
The world is distant now, and unknown,  
Small, receding, and dim, like a well,  
Its dark surface uncovered, trembling,  
Dusk-hidden.

Fireflies  
Wink in the blackness of the yard.  
The oaks are silent, supporting their canopies.  
In the dark  
Who could tell the world's age?  
But again I drink the silence of gods  
From the wells of the oak grove.

## Half of Life

The afternoon is perfect in its sunlit time.  
A tree-lined residential street: no cars  
Or trucks, no taxis with their passengers.  
Here time is timeless, stilled, and silence time.

October sunlight warm upon your skin  
Echoes through yellow corridors of leaves.  
Your body, like an open ear, receives  
Light's word and cannot help but take it in.

Ripeness is ripening. Of its own weight  
The gold leaf falls, the apple strikes the earth.  
But now your aspirations rise – your breath,  
Your mind and body, thirst for the touch of light.

## October Pond

# I

The rim of the pond shore  
                                holds the brimming circle of water.  
The air is mild and the sun is bright.  
The sunlight itself is softly warm.  
There are auras around the crowned tops of the trees. It is         October.

The pond is ringed with ashe and maple trees –

Their yellow leaves translucent with hay-green veins,  
Rose madder leaves wind-touched, rust amber, gold.

The sun is high, the sky a bright pale blue

With luminous banked clouds that flow across,  
far beneath the water's surface.

In places the pond's blue eye is cataracted  
with lily pads of floating maple leaves.

The water's surface of light glitters painfully;  
Some leaves glare in the sun like tin,

And the water, so very flat and still, looks heavy;  
at spots, it shines like mercury.

Small wavelets shimmer through the trees and sky,  
Which undulate toward you on and on,  
like a picture screen on the blink.

Directly before me, below tea-colored water,  
Sunken leaves tile the mud bottom – scarlet, dark, rust,  
forsythia yellow.

Sun-filled trees hang down into the sky.

The shimmer of surface tension –  
The water trembles with stillness.

How deeply it is filled with light.

Waves fold bright spokes through sun-cracking trees,

Trees breaking –  
vibrating bits,  
Fragments of crowns, trunks, and boughs.

## II

At the center of the pond three maples  
hang down through blue sky.

Sun

Shimmers in bright pools of mirror shards  
Above steep slopes of burning clouds –

the trees glitter and flake.  
Though motionless, how subtly they are never still.

In the warm air  
                        more and more leaves flutter downward.  
Each one meets its own reflection  
And then rides it down to itself  
                        making no ripples.

### III

Slow currents push the dead leaves outward  
toward the edge.  
When a cloud shadow passes  
They have a dull metallic look,  
like tarnished silver.

And then once again the pond is all light.

At the center, leaves floating in the glare  
are bright floss in a slant beam of sunlight,

Dust motes on a mirror.

Then three swans have entered the water,  
moving slowly around its edge.  
At the steady pressure of their breasts,  
The whole surface is disturbed.

A soft shock and spread of ripples  
    fans outward from their center  
 And flows  
                                  to the center of the pool,  
 Mazing in a network of shatters.

Yet the water's blue eye cannot close.

Silent  
    small waves  
        touch the shore.

The light quivers, fully liquid,  
                                a sparkling, dripping gold.

In the iris of the creation

Bright trees shiver their leaves in a brief wind.

#### IV

The swans drift suspended in the shallows  
Underneath the trees, on the pond's far side.

They hang stilly there, as though dreaming,  
Dim white shapes above their inverted reflections.

The pond's edge is darkened with shadows  
                                and reflected boughs.

A hundred yards away and to the west  
Is the new Viet Nam Conflict memorial –

A horseshoe of shrubs around a concrete memorial slab.  
Opposite the pond, the grass mounts to a steep hill.

Beyond that is a gateway of maple trees  
In an empty green hollow, burningly filled with sun.

Above all, the sky is a pale intense blue.  
High cloud-tatters spill through October toward November.

You swans, what do you know of the world or owe to it?  
Afloat in the circle of light,

Swimming, motionless, keeping to yourselves?

The autumn light glares on your bodies,  
For an instant you are part of the glare –

The brightness you tread without touching  
And which shimmers out all around you,

Blessed, happy ones, you creatures of light.

## The Sea of Day

### I

At not yet noon  
The sun bares down upon the island – small,  
Glittering in the heat and light as though it were  
a mica spec  
Amid the blue-green water of the bay.

The pines  
Stand on the hillside in the early heat  
Through the long expectant silence of late morning.  
The elements are brought together here. All waits.

And as the sun moves higher in the sky,  
The wind picks up, the waves begin to foam and chop,  
Spurting white suds like beer froth on the rocks.  
The island lies beneath a storm of light, receives the  
midday glare,  
The hard dry wind, the heat – the inland fields parching in  
the sun.

The shore rocks take the punishments of surf.  
And on the shore ridge, in the bright gale of light,  
The pines move swaying, shuddering  
In the elements of light and heat and wind.

## II

The midday's hot white sun is in the sky –  
The sun's blade flashes,  
An acetylene flare in the ragged black pine tops.  
Now at the hottest hour of the day  
The tree tops sway in the steady high sea wind,  
Sea wind that blows the fine white sand  
From where the beach mounts up in empty dunes,  
Blown up to weather shingles of the houses  
On the hill, to scratch and weather paint,  
To filter under tight shut windows,  
Seeping in, to blow in under doors:  
The elements of wind and sand eroding  
What the ocean cannot reach,  
To be another sea, the last of seas.

## III

I walk down to the shore rocks  
In the midday heat. The surf is rough.

The waves break on the rocks,  
Swell and roll in and shatter to a mist  
And shower of white spray. The foam dissolves  
In grey-green water in the shallows, and another  
wave arrives.

The surf is turmoil,  
Water, rock, and time the elements.  
The rock is broken down by waves,  
The waves themselves a showering – the snow  
and glitter of the spray.

Cast up and falling into cascades and pools, the surf  
Leaves weeds and bits of shell that sparkle in the  
heat of day.

#### IV

On the distant water at mid-afternoon  
The waves flash like chrome, they glitter like a million  
points of glass:  
A sea of burning sand, of mica or of quartz –  
The searing points, the molten facets of bright water.

The sun's light is creating all of this,  
Incessant light and nothing but, the light  
Of sheer existence, of pure change.

And day is this wide open realm of noon  
In which the sea and sky are one  
In clarity and brightness, in instantaneous fires  
of transfiguration.

I feel the processes of air and light,  
Of earth and sea and wind, the sea of day  
Disclosed and changing in disclosure without end.

## Morning Walk

I get up very early.  
The sky is still dark,  
A luminous faint green  
Along the tree-line's shag.

I'm out walking around town  
That's quiet now at dawn.  
The streets are slate-colored,  
With no buses, no cars.

I try not to make  
Too much of things.  
Sometimes I'm nice,  
And then a son-of-a-bitch.

A breath of morning air  
Is almost all you need,  
That and some money  
And your eyes and ears working.

One thing I do know,  
Confirmed by long experience:  
People are liars.  
Don't let them fool you.

Which paths lead to freedom?  
Many, not many –  
Many and only one:  
Don't play their game.

The world is so wide,  
Never quite what we think.  
People are liars.  
Don't let them fool you.

### **Coming Back from the Well**

Frost-sun  
Orange  
On the hill's eyelid.

Trees charred with sunrise.  
Ice-vapor of my breath.  
My two feet are frozen.

Yet I carry bright sun  
In my pail.

## Poppy-Snow, Speech-Silence

Insidious and musical,  
The words of all our voices  
Crowd the night. We speak  
And speak, we live  
By speaking only,  
And our speech collects  
Like dust in corners,  
Like the snow that falls;  
The landscape, now forgotten,  
Changed, enhanced,  
Is all we have to walk upon.

Now footprints, though  
They never show bare ground,  
Are what we value most.  
We never touch the ground itself  
Although we sense it vaguely,  
As one feels a pain grown distant  
As the morphine takes hold.

White flakes of morphine snow,  
Causing to forget, forgotten,  
All white, like paper,  
Or like our ultimate desire.

My two feet poppy-numbed  
With bare half-recognition,  
Despite the rushing crowd  
Of voices silent  
In the night's shell of my ear,  
The whispered clamor of the moonlit  
Spider-shadow-branches where I stand –

Despite these I am here,  
My feet upon the snow,  
The sea-foam of the cresting wave  
Of thought-speech-silence  
And of silenced speaking thought.

I feel the falling snow,  
The wave on wave  
Of infinite unnumbered voices.  
Dig your own grave in snow, they say.  
My tongue upon the shovel's frozen metal,  
Placed there as though to take  
The wafer of communion snow,  
Now ripped away –

Despite the spurting blood – whose blood? –  
Despite the silence all around,

I try to speak again.

## Winter Night in a Small Town in the United States

Night.

The snow  
Is falling still,  
And the night is silent – entirely.  
No thought  
Is given anymore  
To what is happening  
Elsewhere, somewhere –  
Somewhere  
Very far from here,  
So very far from snowy fields  
And from the meditative lamplight  
In the silent house.

Here every house  
Is far from every other one,  
Cocooned in winter privacy.  
Fluorescent moonlight  
Makes a waxen surface of the frozen pond.  
The woods around  
Are black like sumeï ink;  
The sky is cobalt blue around  
The full, white, pock-marked,  
Shining moon.  
Snow fields on the distant hills  
Show dim and bluish gray.

From every chimney  
A film of luminous faint smoke  
Rises absolutely straight,  
Like the smoke-wraith of a candle,  
Rising straight up toward the moon.

There is no wind.  
The temperature is ten below.

These sleepers now asleep  
Will never wake.  
They will not die;  
They will not live.  
Living among them, even those  
Who stay up late  
To watch the night,  
To read or listen to the news,  
Will never wake.  
They too must sleep, for everybody must.  
Moving among them,  
Living while they nearly do,  
A few faint thoughts  
Will never break the silence  
Of the dim night-frozen world.

Here nothing will occur  
And nothing can.

The snow continues falling.  
The night grows colder still.  
Away somewhere, far away,  
Whatever happens happens.  
Freedom is everywhere.  
The world is wide, so wide, so deeply frozen,  
Silent, dead.  
Yes, freedom is everywhere, and freedom,  
Calls to everyone.  
The snow continues falling.  
The night is still.  
The town is as it always was.

**September 1989**

Walking on an evening in September,  
The sun already down below the trees to the west,  
I see the last orange light  
Above the black silhouette of the hills.

The sidewalk reaches outward ahead  
Through the tree-columned dusk.  
Beyond is the disused factory,  
The newspaper building, the old public school.

My shadow flows along at my heel,  
Stretching out longer and longer  
Now half a block to the east.  
The grass is dark brown in the last wash of ebb light.

I feel the pressure of the dirt shoulder,  
The springing resilient grass underfoot.  
The evening air is quite cool, sharp  
With the frankincense of wood smoke, the earth  
scent of leaves.

I walk toward the sunset –  
A soft yellow light, with a halo of orange  
Above the black carbon-like edge,  
As though a low flame

Were burning a ragged edge in black paper,  
An immaterial fire  
To transfigure the world  
But not change it.

To the east the sky is breaking out  
More clearly into stars.  
Sudden joy at sunset!  
How beautiful the evening is.

In the darkening expanding night  
The bats come out  
And skim from tree to tree  
For moths and flies.

The world becomes unreal  
For some moments  
In the bronze dimness of the evening.  
And then in the webbing shadows

Beneath the lamplit maple trees,  
The street, so unexpectedly,  
Is real once again, more real than before –  
And yet uncertain, altered,

Trembling on the verge  
Of what we feel it must become.  
Sudden joy at sunset, unpredictable yet real.  
The air is fragrant, wonderful, a presence in the dark.

The orders of the stars appear.  
The late last orange and yellow-green  
Glow far off in the distant low west  
Above the burnt-off edge of the world.

What now, in this barely illuminated moment,  
Is History? The origin,  
Never to be seen,  
Of the crisis of all that is?

At night the world is less a public space  
And you no longer visible  
To every driver in each car.  
The area around your form becomes a sheath.

Headlights blink along the tree-lined  
Memorial Boulevard.

They glitter into frame in the distance  
Then grow incrementally closer,  
A steady skein of light streaks

Rhythmically cut by tree shadows,  
The black spaces between the frames.  
Tracer bullets rush past. It's eight o'clock.  
The traffic is sucked steadily along.

The bright metallic glitter of headlights  
Can catch you momentarily  
But never pin you down.  
You realize suddenly that this is freedom.

Night is like a pocket opened up  
Inside the fabric of the world.  
In its limitless starred space, as in a mirror,  
You apprehend yourself –

A shadow among shadows.  
Yet who's to say  
You haven't somehow profited  
-- indeterminately, secretly –

By being nearly invisible?

## Autumn

Leaf-fall,  
And the water rains down  
Onto my face,  
Arterial roots and ganglia fill  
In the cold dark, tingling  
In the bright dream of autumn,  
Overflow, and  
The waters brim up  
Through the leaf rotting soil,  
Earth-fragrant,  
Now soft to the step.

The morning shines wet  
Through the wind-sponsored oak –  
Luminous, hay-green, gold flaking –  
That, rustling,  
Crumbles wind-touched,  
Showering yellow leaves  
And bright drops of water.

Now, looking up  
Through the luminous boughs,  
The falling floating leaves,  
Into the blue and empty sky,  
I stand at the edge of speech,  
I stand at the edge of thought.

## Sunset

Four o'clock and bright winter sun.  
Sunset glares along the edges of the buildings –  
Metallic winter light.

Building and tree shadows in the crimson sun  
Are black bars lengthening,  
Fixed crosswise on the earth,  
The shadow-grating of the world.

Shadow-bars  
Are sharp against the sun-illuminated  
Pavement.

The shadow of the tree  
Is arteries and veins.  
The bristle of bare twigs  
Is capillary webs –  
They waver on the pavement-aura,  
The copper-streaming glare.

Four o'clock and bright winter sun.

## **A Field Somewhere in the North Country**

**D**ecember night. The stars shine brightly  
Over the deserted hill  
And the snow-covered field,  
Over the luminous forgotten earth,

The earth forgotten by the bird,  
The fox, the bear, forgotten by men,  
Forgotten by the sun.

Tonight it lies abandoned, silent,  
Glimmering with its light of snow;  
It shows palely like an open bed,  
A white bed sheet, in a long darkened room.

## **On a Cliff Near the Sea: Among the Pines**

These shadows in the branches – green pine trees,  
And in among the pines the scent of pine,  
A woody sweet scent and essence of sweet sap,  
The green arboreal scent of pine and earth.

And with it in the breeze the breath of sea,  
So essences of both the sea and land,  
The freshness of the sea, its open change:  
I stand and wait and breathe both with each breath.

And high up in the branches of the trees  
The sun is broken from its noontide glare  
To dappled light and intermittent shade.  
The pine-sweet scent of noon falls from the tree.

This pine-fragrance and this pine-dappled light  
Bestowed here in the circle of this shade  
Now littered with green needles, fallen cones,  
And with the soft red dust and silt of years,

The coming of this moment here in time  
Is like a new disclosure of the sea  
Each moment new and flowing through me now,  
The sea of day disclosed and changing still.

## The Visit

The old town I revisit  
After so many days –  
Here I filled in my life piece by piece,  
Yet the picture it shows me  
Is a puzzle no less,  
Though I know all its darkening side streets  
And leaf-shadowed ways.

The June night is blowing  
And threatening rain,  
As I walk the dark streets  
Trying not to be seen.  
I had stood at the window  
Of the downtown hotel room:  
The city's small grid-work of lights  
And the lights down along the banks of the river  
And the clusters of lights  
On the opposite shore.

The picture, the lived puzzle,  
Can only grow larger.  
Yet I know it so well.  
It has gathered enigmas.  
Is it only a tangle  
Of times and of places?

And yet no one is here,  
Even though everything, all is here to be seen,  
To be seen but not known.  
I must know where I've been.

The street signs  
Grow dimmer in sight  
And in memory,  
And the streets are all tangled.  
Time confuses the nights.

Is this really the door?  
Is this the same threshold  
Where I stood once before,  
Where I waited for her steps on the stairs?  
And yet no one is here.  
The mail box shows  
Another name in her place.

Stories confused  
And grown dim  
Echo in the rain-blowing street.  
The oak leaves are flurried  
And fall in the rain.  
Time to go back to where I have come from.  
I must know where I've been.

## **Wax on Snow**

Cut glass on snow banks, and on each tree a tap.  
The sun is warm. The maple's sap  
Is flowing. And soon we'll go  
To try the season's wax on snow.

At the touch of cracked ice  
The steaming hot fluid becomes  
A translucent web that stiffens  
And congeals.

Amber in memory, rippled  
And rugose, air-bubbled,  
And with a vague crystal structure beneath.  
Warm-cold and toffee-like between my teeth.

Amber of memory: it preserves  
In sugary crystals  
The frozen ice-land beneath its caul,  
Melting quickly yet still palpable.

## The Wall

One afternoon in late December I approach  
The Viet Nam War Memorial.  
Low clouds are the color of cigarette ash.  
There is a cold smoky rain.

It's two o'clock. Translucent cauls and crusts  
Of melting ice are on the grass.  
The brown and yellow grass  
Is streaked with mud the color of wet hay.

At the entrance to the visitors'  
Walkway which leads to the Memorial  
A homeless man, a veteran,  
Stands with a styrofoam coffee cup held out.

Along the broad and tree-lined boulevards  
Of the miles long National Mall  
Others of the homeless have pitched their makeshift tents  
Of muddy plastic tarpaulin, old blankets, cardboard scraps,

An army of the Potomac, come home to stay,  
And given nervous glances by tourists  
On their way to the Smithsonian Museum, the National  
Gallery, the Hirschorn, or the Corcoran.

The ground is soggy with cold winter rain.  
My breath smoke spools and wafts,  
Frittering away before each breath.  
In spots the grass is green. There are brown muddy leaves.

At the far end of an enormous empty field,  
A sort of park,  
The Washington Monument nearly disappears  
In low cloud mist. Mathematically straight, precise,

Yet now dim and vague, it is  
A draughtsman's sketch half erased  
And fading into graphite blur,  
The dimness of off-white, paper-colored clouds.

Once past the shivering and begging man  
I enter the narrow path to the Memorial.  
Black paving stones  
Mark off the way as you descend.

Each stone precisely set and spaced,  
All uniform, a dull tar-black,  
Each one the length of a man's boot,  
With measured intervals between –

A kind of public road  
And paved  
For an anticipated and long public use,  
An unknown and unspecified many

To follow in these steps,  
Which lead you down into the chevron  
Incised in excavated earth, a wedge,  
Geometrically precise, a granite wall,

Set down into a pit, the wall's top edge  
Just level with the field itself,  
A granite cliff face, absolutely sheer,  
Black granite though, and highly polished

To reflect, and to reflect remarkably.  
You cannot help but see yourself  
Reflected in its shine,  
So very like the polished black facades

Of modernistic nineteen-sixties  
Banks; the wall's  
A dark and high-gloss mirror  
For the passers-by.

Now halfway down the path I crouch to look.  
Behind my shoulder the others  
Are reflected in the wet black stone.  
The names are rather faint,

Like the dimmest chalk marks  
On a blackboard, half-erased,  
And yet not quite. The beads of rain  
Have still not washed them off.

Kenneth C. Berrier  
Reginald A. Brown  
Robert C. Burke

Further down into the pit  
The tablets of black stone  
Are now above my head;  
I move down step by step,

A cat stuck on a ladder, rung by rung,  
A ladder reaching down so far,  
Which must be gotten down  
While facing straight ahead.

Robert D. Cicio  
Billy Joe Cole  
William F. Coleman

Yet steadily the cold rain falls.  
Over the faintest names the rain drops hang,  
Beads of cold water on black stone.  
The rain drops hang but do not fall.

Philip T. Lindsay  
Roland E. Moore  
Kevin S. Mulgrew

From a distance of ten paces  
The ranks of names  
Are a blurred script, indeterminate,  
Hieroglyphic, meticulous, encoded, blank.

My trench coat, beige, reflected in the script,  
Looks like a yellowed page of newsprint;  
The rows of letters mark my coat  
And my mirrored looming brow

Which floats beaded with water drops  
Within the depthless space of mirror shine  
Somewhere between the fine print  
And the glossy tablets of black stone.

The immaterial script flows  
Through my forehead.  
The wall is a funhouse mirror  
Of baffling reflections.

Bobby C. Sutherland  
Kaley A. Somer  
Larry K. Spangler

Three women, young and beautiful,  
Are on their way back up the path:  
Expensive winter coats, lustrous blonde hair  
Tossed and shimmering. They've had enough.

James C. Albertini  
Larry Anderson  
Francis I. Arnett

And here, jammed between two granite slabs,  
Someone's red plastic flower  
Is witness and memorial,  
Like saxifrage come up between the stones.

John W. Clary  
Steven Sam Choy Ching  
Alton Smith

So many names. Yet you always see yourself,  
With peering half-transparent face  
Or reaching with one hand  
To trace your way along the rows and rows of names,

Perhaps to touch a name, one name.  
Some people seem to feel their way along,  
Like feeling along a hallway  
In the dark, or perhaps like reading braille.

Or some stand back a way to judge  
And to regard, to verify the whole.  
My face leans forward to behold,  
Through beaded water drops, names of the dead.

And so you see yourself, the other,  
Reflected in this darkness,  
In its infinitely depthless  
Mirror-realm; and yet

You see him there not darkly  
But all too clearly now;  
You're separated here by just  
The thinnest of thin pages,

The flowing newsprint of these names,  
The blank front page of history,  
The last page of a life,  
A page that has no other side.

For nothing lies beyond. And nothing can.  
What, finally, is more opaque  
Than a mirror, or darker to the studied eye?  
Who knows what has been done?

Angelo Torres  
Alan H. Zimmerman  
Leroy Hicks

To one side of the populated wall,  
A hundred yards away,  
A metal statue of three soldiers  
Marks the other entrance to the park.

Their wrinkled uniforms  
Are curdled with the stuccoed look  
Of crinkled bronze; copper-colored,  
Dull brown, the color of dead oak leaves.

Their pectorals exposed by open shirts,  
Like beef cake male models,  
They seem to slap each other  
On the back, like drunks, with rough bonhomie.

A grove of winter trees around them,  
They are like children wandering  
The barren, fabled wood –  
Waving away annoying smoke and fumes.

The M-79 could be a woodsman's tool,  
An axe across  
The Yankee yeoman's shoulder,  
As he soberly regards what's left.

The visitors are ordinary, burgher-like,  
Students and tourists annoyed at the inconvenient  
Cold continuous rain.  
Apparently it will not stop.

A volunteer, a veteran himself,  
Trim, with gray and grizzled crew-cut hair  
And a shiny apple-green  
Track and field jacket and white sneakers,

Dispenses helpful information  
To the intermittent curious  
Who mill around  
With plastic gift shop bags and colorful umbrellas.

They see their own reflections  
In the granite wall  
Gleaming wetly in the rain  
Like a strip of celluloid.

The granite bleeds reflections, and they come,  
These people, as though it all were real,  
To drink at the dark pit,  
The pincer shape incised into the ground.

Yet still, they are not fooled.  
Celluloid flickerings, they know quite well  
That they're the main attraction,  
The main event, the stars,

Come here to watch themselves  
And watch themselves be watched –  
Pious, oblivious, sincere.  
It is a rite, and an investiture.

It is as though a burden here  
Were laid upon their shoulders,  
Which is their diffident nobility,  
Diffident, and yet unyielding,

For they shall not forget  
The boyish self-regard  
Of noble causes,  
The maudlin satisfactions of defeat.

And still the cold rain falls.  
Bare branches and bare twigs  
Are capillary webs  
Against the iron-grey and blue-grey sky.

Some visitors are led to take  
Their temporary shelter  
Underneath the pillars and high portico  
Of Lincoln's memorial nearby.

Lincoln: silent preserver of the Union.  
The hieratic presence, reserved, austere,  
Massive, inquisitorial, complete.  
And there, inscribed in stone:

*In this temple  
As in the hearts of the people  
For whom he saved the Union  
The memory of Abraham Lincoln  
Is enshrined forever*

And when you turn around you see  
From where you stand  
Beneath the massive pillars of the temple,  
Across the length of empty fields

No longer green, rain-soaked  
And half in mist, directly opposite,  
The Washington Memorial  
Just barely visible in fog.

It is a marker in the distance,  
A point of origin,  
Of departure and return, a pole,  
The one end of a circuit of some kind,

Here, now, traversed and re-traversed  
By the current of events,  
Of history, of time, of fate.  
In the fields, black flocks of crows

Wheel and gather and disperse,  
Alighting here and there  
On the brown grass and on bare trees,  
Calling and calling continually.

## SECOND WORLD: A LIFE

### BOOK ONE: LIGHTSTREAMINGS

This sunny breeze  
the white lace curtain  
fills  
then falls  
and it is you

This moment of warm breeze  
of warmth and light

A form now nearly light itself  
as I lie here beside you  
my head upon your breast

I only have one thought

And it is you

A rhythm an impulse  
a process  
felt continuity  
completely realized at last –  
this has led me here

And therefore I enter light and warmth

your skin is warm  
and has its own soft light

as though the sunny breeze  
which is both light and air  
had taken form  
and you were it

a warmth I enter and a light I touch

I wait for when the curtain next will fill  
and then fall back

A woman  
a warm breeze

A breath

I sat there  
by the window that afternoon  
the day was hot and bright  
harsh blue of sky  
noon heat's shimmer on the street  
a glare of yellow  
spokes of sunlight  
shifting through the treetop  
In the leaves there was a stippling glare of sun  
and it was burning the tree  
and the treetop was swaying  
in the afternoon's hot dry breeze

I sat there thinking  
in that place

that afternoon    that time

deep the center  
within

subsistence    breathing

within

the center

I thought

myself

as myself

and

there was a clarity

like the clarity of light

no more the darkness of a child

a space    opened

gradually

had already

light    to think of it as?    as time?

as day

No longer I    I merely    yet I

still    and still    still

I watched      waited

looking    seeing

visibility itself    seeing it

time    space  
          space-light

radiant    there

treetop moving

wind sound in the leaves

Blue sky

Now

and then            just now

it is    it was    is    it

no word            now

There was no

And yet

Word

spoken somewhere

in some movement

Within what often speaks

Something beneath movement  
though not really

not that

thought perhaps language self not  
self still

blue enigma sky  
green enigma earth

memory

But the spring is  
the season of new present

the purple lilac laden near the fence

wavers in the wind

just newly mild

that sight

not an enigma  
but experience of fact see it there

luminous in day time-space light

So rich that lilac color almost blue

clusters of light purple  
against the bright white shingles of the house  
that glare in the morning sun

on the line white sheets still damp  
flap in the breeze like sails

The breeze comes from the north  
and brings the feel of activity  
although the air's still cool  
and there is a sharpness

a clarity everywhere

The air is clean and bright  
the sun a hard bright light  
unmixed with too much warmth

And so in this moment of spring brightness

the crisp breeze flapping the white sheet  
that dries in the sun slowly  
and grows just noticeably warm to the touch  
as noon comes on

and yet the air still has its edge of cold

In a time  
that is both cool and warm  
upon the skin

we move about in the bright sunlight  
and fresh air

And in the running light                  we sail off to where?

This activity in the air \_\_\_\_\_ and breathing

and in the mind    thought

visibility itself  
for moving in clean air  
I breathe the scent  
of earth so deeply in  
now risen up again  
fragrance of damp earth  
countless the scent of flowers  
of mud and grass and rain  
the unpredictable dissemination  
renewal  
in the air  
and in each breath  
and in the mind as well  
The sources open and we move through them  
in this moment of sunlight  
and of spring warmth  
in this instant  
this breath of time  
they cannot close  
Sources underground  
washed by rain  
that trickles through the soil  
the run-off water  
at the first spring thaw

and later when the March and April rains  
                                  have soaked the soil through  
                  the buds of the earth flush  
open  
to the running streams  
the rain  
                  activity  
                          a kind of warmth  
as roots of trees  
                                  the complicated  
roots  
ganglia of earthen threads respond  
                                  and tubers move from sleep

I drift in the night  
                  in the waters of the night

which are my sleep  
                  which are

the waters of energy moving through  
  stillness

                  like sound across still water  
almost infinite   echo after echo  
                  ripples moving outward on a pond  
                                  concentrically

                  for when one dreams one listens  
dreaming is listening

But to what?

                  what is it that you hear?

                  what is it moving upward through plateaus of water

through the roots of earth  
subterranean sources  
    depths and darkness of the body itself  
to move within the corridors of mind  
that is no longer mind and not yet mind  
neither of body nor of mind  
    this energy this source  
    although within each breath  
it can be felt  
    and heard  
as with  
an ear against the ground  
or heard as  
    music in the mind is heard   silently  
    felt music  
Now stand and  
    feel each breath  
        an inner power   pressed  
downward  
to your stomach   through your legs  
to some deep point within the earth  
That is how deep you go  
and upward likewise

the heart    the egress of the throat  
                         the processes of thought

                 the center of a sphere  
of many spheres    moving outward to

                         the edges of the horizon  
This is the measure of how far  
                         how deep you go

                 the depths  
                         the extensions  
the realms  
                 to which you must respond  
                         which must respond to you

                                 even if not in kind

With rain  
                 and whipping leaves  
                                 and the random energy of wind  
                 the summer storm declares itself  
                         moving through the night outside

The tops of the trees sway  
                 moments of a force that moves  
                         through them  
in currents gathered from minute events  
                         accumulating power  
expressed in whitened leaves  
                         and staggering, surging boughs

to alter point by point  
                 that airy structure  
                         of living energy

the treetop  
    and its fine articulations  
                    leaf-vein    leaf to stem  
    to twig and twig to branch  
            and larger branch  
and all the intervening space which clarifies its form

The treetop swaying  
            bending  
    swaying in the summer's hurricane  
            a tremor or some bass note of vibration  
                    active through the tree  
and down into the roots

And here and there some leaves  
    and broken branches lie scattered on the ground

I breathed the sweet night-scent of summer  
    and moved among the forces of the storm  
        coming and going in the night like them

The energy of storm  
                    of wind and rain  
                    undifferentiated movement  
and pure force  
                    mingled with the scent of night  
                    with breath  
                    with being  
            and with thought

Thought    and each thought  
                    or even each thing I see  
            a seed  
  
    which blossoms    finally



they shone with a kind of dark light  
in the arbor's darkness

The splendor of something alien  
if only for a moment

How firm they were to the touch  
a tough resilient minutely veined inside  
torn in the teeth and bleeding its red blood

You took one then bit into it  
and then spit out the pit  
then stared at the open half there in your hand

your face was partly hidden in green shadows  
but your hair was touched with the yellow and gold  
sunlight  
that threw its checker work  
on the green picnic table  
and on the brown scuffed dirt  
and on the grass

and then I took one too

The cherry when you open it  
reveals its intricate and secret beauty  
running with sweet juice  
a beauty which is a very delicate surface  
dark red and wet and pebbly  
like the inside of an eyelid

This is what the cherry is  
and when you open it  
you know that you have touched  
something  
in the world

if only for a moment

Now in this

instant

moment

of this process

Move to become what we cannot possess but

only touch

as I likewise must

As the mingling fragrances of the warm night

drift in the arbor's privacy

this place of darkness

Shadows among shadows

the leaves are ragged woven

black shapes

fluttering

in the occasional breeze

We lie here together

we two alone

and no one knows we're here

I will enter you head to foot

and you

will accept

contain encompass and become

What you had lacked before

I will become what I had lacked

Shadows over shadows over  
shadows  
interpenetrate transformed transfigured

Transformed  
momentarily the pulse is touched  
the life is motivated

Outside the night moves silently about  
outside the breeze moves in the night  
Leaves flutter in the occasional breeze  
the stars are so bright so many and so clear  
detailed precise

There are so many stars  
amid the shadows  
which are powers  
presences moving through the night  
you sense them know them hear them  
and the night is made of them

and many innumerable stars the stars you see  
and those which have gone dark

What better place for thinking than an arbor?

It's not for nothing that they say  
     one's thoughts turn green in a green shade  
                     or might perhaps

If one were quiet enough and calm  
and maybe shrewd as well  
enough to put all sense of loss away   disquiet  
and remorse   reflection   remembrance   time

the jagged shrapnel    the sharp shards of glass  
   which are the elements of pain

   if they are picked out of my eye  
and some healing fluid  
   ran down and washed all clean and clear

What would I see?  
   in that reconstructed newness  
   what would there be?

I sat there in the arbor

   there were grape vines  
   with their broad and easily agitated leaves  
   and underneath  
   the knotted threads and strings  
   and sinews of the vines themselves

Along one wall were trellised roses  
   yellow roses    soft and rich

I leaned back in the wooden seat  
   it wasn't difficult to rest  
for the sun had tired me out that afternoon

   And when I closed my eyes  
I saw the after-images of suns  
   drifting yellow spots and dazzling splotches

A flash-bulb after-image  
   that floated in an undefined black space

And

gradually  
an image formed

not of the sun

But luminous

a geometry clarity  
a fluid light yet  
solid

And with the wraith of water

like the smoke of your breath in cold

And then the glare the reflection of sunlight

a blinding luminous white

a piece of ice I'd seen

dripping its melt like rain in the February thaw  
the eave drops catching the bright sun

The slightest throb of summer in the ice

when for an interval the cold breaks  
the ice thaws partially

breaking up

and the icicles depending from the eaves  
will steam and drip  
and thaw in the warm sun

No run-off water yet

there's not been time for that

just minor glistening streams of ice water  
all just that moment thawed

Now everything steams snow banks puddles  
the ice-bound turf

long-hardened tire tracks

in the frozen mud

[illegible]

And yet the air's still cool  
though by comparison it has to feel warm

A virtual heat wave you might think when everyone comes  
out from winter clothes  
going with jackets open  
hats off no gloves no scarves  
who lately were like mummies  
so wrapped you couldn't tell one person from the next in  
snow storm or clear weather but only knew their clothes

But all that's cast aside    all suddenly irrelevant  
as though there'd never been a winter here at all  
all open    lightened    easy once again

[illegible]

The sun comes into me    new warmth comes into me  
                                  the air still cool yet warm enough  
 and if not warm enough I make it warm  
                                  moving in the momentary thaw

in the bright prefiguration of spring

The ice throbs in my hand

Warmth of the sun flows into me  
and flows

Into the ice which melts  
And then is water  
and then vapor

Rising –  
white smoke in the sunny cold

The sun  
puts out its Word

And everything hears the sound

The heavens echoing  
they are a ringing bell

And the sound is light

A light came into my room  
a winter sunlight without warmth

It was a glare reflected from the ice and snow outside

A cold light through the frozen glass  
which rang like a champagne glass struck lightly  
like a Tibetan prayer bowl

and then I couldn't see  
There were just circles of yellow light darkened

like rings of flash-bulb after-blindness

I felt like I was blacking out

The world was woozy and unreal

And there was this light around me

And within the quiet crystal of that room composed of light

It flowed

and I could hear it passing with a streaming sound

I felt a penetrating warmth come forth

then cold was like a whisper in my ear

I didn't breathe or need to breathe

A flame poured down into my open throat  
a blue and opal-colored flame  
like burning alcohol or lighter fluid lit

It flowed around the edges of my body  
it burned through everything

The walls of outward space were gone

Meaning's powers signs filling burning cooling

the floor the light the light's switch  
the pillow's shade of green

space was solid

solid I want to say and laugh

sounds fill the wall pulsations suffused with light

Now open wide the curtain  
    reveal the trees so huge  
    caging the whole room

four directions of the compass stream  
    like an oil being poured around the sky

    the sun is small  
    far in its microscopic world

    forms and lines burgeon   space-time is evacuated  
    filling again bodies of whatever kind  
    yet there is only one kind

                    glisten with tiny flames

The doors of solid substance burning  
    burned   were gone

    squares circles triangles   like angels   light spots  
    sunspots  
    blacking out I woke up  
    waking up I blacked out

I rose falling through the floor ceiling  
    my mind outside the house   somewhere  
    the floors transparent  
    the walls were translucent fire

I walked out over streams of molten glass

And passed through

    all the substance of the world streamed in me

I was the mountain  
I was the mountain raining

and water falling   snows   cascades

an avalanche of bees buzzing

I was the mountain raining and buzzing

I was the mountain  
the world was very small

And then I walked out of it

O hear my voice  
which comes from   where?

Where all things....

But  
From the cloister   the personal darkness  
what can come?

What can come  
from this dark room  
where I lie awake all night

As I have before  
so many nights  
or when sometimes I'd rise from bed  
and pace the kitchen floor

and sit there at the table

The faucet leaks

Time dripping in the puddles of the sink

One drop   another one   one drop each time

Each second was a drop

And second and second coalesce to be  
                    a pool of time that bleeds away   slowly  
Until at length there isn't any time at all

But just a blank space   a duration of some kind  
                    (although what kind?)

A region of the past   perhaps  
                                    and I sitting there  
My dead self  
                            or some other person entirely  
                            long ago   what matter then

Listening to the drip of time

And yet not hearing it  
                    for at that hour of the night

Time is no longer time

All is now   each drop is just a token  
                                    and all the drops together  
collect to a pool of time   so slowly

Are just now

Like someone on a summer day

Just watching

I sit there Who?

For that is

what he does what one does

O so late at night you watch the window there

At first all darkness a square of black

And no window at all

for nothing is outside

Darkness within and darkness too without

there is no difference either way and so

The window is a sheet of glass (now black)

framed by a casement

fringed with white curtains

And in the bedroom

likewise

where I've returned

the window is still dark

I sit here in the darkness

in this room

watch for signs of day

for light

to infiltrate the edges of the blinds

And there is color gradually

although by no perceptible process  
the window violet  
then polar blue    and then a grayish lilac  
                                 but glowing  
And then a brighter glow  
                 with streaks of pink and orange  
                                 and then a yellow glare  
The sun    gradually    with day  
                                 and day's activity and power  
The question still remaining: Will you go along?  
For energy has leaked into the room now in the guise of  
   light  
                                 but quietly  
                 like strength increasing gradually with time  
Or time itself  
                 no longer drop by drop  
                                 but flowing through in increments  
A sparkle  
                         a flare  
                                 a fire on the slats of the blinds  
The leak a stream  
And then the burning river of the day  
I got up    pulled open the blinds    opened up the windows

A room of warm sunlight  
all yellow  
but not yellow – radiant

The chair by the window glowing in the ambient light  
 an aura all around  
 as though I never could have seen it or imagined it before

I reached to touch the back of it  
but saw my hand fall short  
and touch just empty space

And I fell forward with my head on the chair's lap  
(I had it now)

The walls were drifting    active    vibrant

Did I say empty space?

This space was all warm light  
held innumerable fluid planes   streams   waves

all burning still and moving very slowly

an atmosphere  
like honey pouring  
and the air like warm champagne  
all full of points of energy  
a thrilling rushing sensation  
that ran through every part of me

This was the feel of time  
the beauty of all space  
the ardent joy of sunlight

I tried to stand once more  
the room still vivid and yet steady  
and slowly accepting step by step my presence

And then a sudden break

a door left open

and within there was a darker warmth

I couldn't see inside  
my eyes still seeing the bright sun  
the tingly blackout yellow after-images

gradually plum-colored shadows

the purple darkness the room

And then at last her form:

Just risen from the bath and

bending forward at the waist

and looking intently  
at herself

I stepped back she became all shadows once again

One night in the back yard in deep summer

the night was total darkness

Like an eyelid closed

The complex earth scent  
carried on the slightest breeze

Was all I knew

And looking out a ways, I thought –

Are my eyes open? Or have I closed them?

and then –

a spark

another

another

another

another

The merest flake of light

a wake of sparkling points

gone

pure appearance

less than momentary

gone as soon as recognized

Fireflies

lead the eye on deeper into the night  
where the garden lay

One Saturday my friend and I sat in the cafe

activity the activity of day

the general activity  
of coming and going doing undoing  
of no one type or consequence  
but of all types and of all shapes and sorts  
having all results  
a thousand atoms points of consciousness  
amounting to no one collective thing  
and yet no longer single or separate

People of all sorts went by the cafe windows  
as we sat there amid the discreet jazz  
and clink of cup and saucer

The talking in the room amid our conversation  
a flow of energy  
in the context of that place and time  
the many currents in confluence all around  
of other conversations (all going on at once)  
of traffic noise of cars and buses

shouts in the street  
of radios  
music players a thousand conversations more  
tires and brakes trucks shifting gear  
a hundred cars a thousand cars ten thousand cars  
exhaust from cars

and walkers browsers hurriers  
collected at street corners  
or dispersed on the park green

And later for us  
the gallery of modern art

Cool and quiet cooler than the park

More quiet than the mind itself

Moving  
through its corridors its galleries its rooms  
and rooms following  
leading on to other works  
More paintings more exhibits

We wondered  
can there be a labyrinth of beauty?

And then a panel or a large portal

The foreground a bright room

The sunny yellow paint that glows like real light

A radiance all but bewildering

There is a sense of life lived there in that space

The open window and the chair nearby

Then to the left a door – within  
the shadows



past it  
around it

Consider the eyelids then  
the eyes now closed delicate

the skin  
an opal pink playing  
in those realms of coloration that it has

It is a medium of light, the skin  
touched now with visible warmth

Or then the mouth  
or the softly throbbing places near the throat  
The throat itself for words  
which are the evidences of mind

the shoulders narrow graceful  
and then the slender arms

The pale nipples like crinkled rose petals  
pink and slight

These an evidence that this in itself  
is not all

but something must come after it  
living beyond it in a new time  
carrying its beauty there made new again  
inexhaustible beauty, undying

ardent acquiescence  
adrift in that special medium  
as though a dream  
twilight consciousness

and dream

how you desire this but why?

feelings are

what are they?

a fluid and glittering substance

like to a fountain of

iridescent foam spattered

beautiful the vial broken

and overflowing

running like streams

along the contours of that body

erotic flower

spread naked to the star-filled night

yet folded as though in dream

Searching out radiance

I went along the shore

to see the hollowed bowls

the newly filled up pools

The smallest thing I wanted – a fragment of the sea

the water is so clear when framed in rock

the rock

through the sunny pane of water

luminous

too clear and shallow to reflect

what can it be but water?

no more than water and no less

There's plenty more where that came from

for here the sea is the Pacific

from here there is just water

mile after mile of tropic sea  
murmuring in calms of deep midnight  
with only a breathing swell

And in the noon the blue the blue-green bright fields  
white foam and silver sparkle

Endless

advancing  
in the running wind

and then the days of gale and typhoon

then the still

Burning calms The "hot and copper sky"

The mind moves thus into the tropic sea

"When gliding by the Bashee isles we emerged at last upon  
the great South Sea..."

the Mariner's nightmare,  
its sinister whisper:

"Consider the subtleness of the sea;

how its most dreaded creatures glide  
underwater...treacherously hidden  
beneath the loveliest tints of  
azure...Consider...the  
universal cannibalism of the sea...."

And the dream, the visionary circles of his friend:

"...not only do they believe that the stars are isles,  
But that far beyond all visible  
horizons, their own mild,  
uncontinented seas interflow with  
the blue heavens; and so form the  
white breakers of the milky way."

Although he had not yet had glimpse of the terrifying god  
the actual, unfathomable reality

The waves act on each other they pile up  
uncountable acts which then  
disrupt themselves in surf and rocky shallows  
or dissipate in foam and weeds slopped on the sand  
in a day the weeds are rank  
then dried stiffened and caked

In this way therefore  
the sea becomes the beach gradually

I went along the beach that day

looking for a fragment of the sea

But in the bright sun

radiance was scattered all before me

-- the sea of sparkling light  
each grain of sand, diamond --

Looked out on troughs of diamonds  
waves of opal light    impossible to look at

Burning  
                 infinitesimal            light and time

And then this flowed away

a wave had washed it back into the sea

the sea was water once again  
                                 an infinite blue field

burning in the energy of noon

The clarity of space this afternoon

as all of sunlight fills the summer's world  
the light impalpable  
                                 without substance  
   pure and clear  
now designates the realms of space  
                                 apparent to the eye  
the vast geometries of light  
transparent    half-perceived  
                                 and changing in the processes of noon

as I walk here just at this time of day

luminous time  
and burning luminous space

space of all spaces  
inclusive creating more

active living space empty and holy emptiness  
creating allowing forgetting

The sun now gently warm upon my shoulder  
the bright blue sky  
the luminous white clouds slowly passing

And light is now a virtual part of thought

a plenitude of life the activity in which  
one lives and breathes and moves about

a plenitude of being and nonetheless fluidity

changing  
and a part of this free and open space

It is a kind of ambience empowerment  
each breath each step

an energy dispersing  
re-gathering to itself

articulating time  
moving forms implicit in the day

these forms through which I move  
beginning the expression of this change

Living Time  
in this actual light and space

Luminous day    transcendent therefore

Infinite

Radiant space and time

Fleeting recurring    endless    uncontained

full of powers    seen    unknown

And this is the actual plum  
it is not a metaphor  
here there are no metaphors

it is not  
an emblem for the body's hidden life

It is the plum itself  
but yet it draws the eye    the hand  
and finally the mind

I become myself in tasting it  
and it remains itself  
exposed    ripped open though it is  
for it always is concealed nonetheless

like the body's hidden life

Concealment is the essence of the flesh  
without that there can be no life

and yet it must be known    however deep it hides

without that    likewise    there can be no life

I sit beneath the tree    the noon is quiet    warm  
                         the wind sound in the leaves the only sound  
the shadows keep me from the July sun

Now seven o'clock in the evening and late August  
                         the day is falling  
   and the sunset is red-orange aslant  
   the cornfield

The cornfield ripples and foams  
   in the evening wind  
                         how subtly it is never still  
The perceptible heat of sunset burns my face  
                         the roadside grass is tinted  
                                 and full of small shadows

At times  
I have to turn away when the field blurs  
                         in the strong light

                                 near-blindness before the glare

And in the sunset's orange tint

   the green stalks of the corn  
are lacquered emerald  
the blond corn silk glows a copper-gold

The wind blows on the field  
                                 like a fire billowing

I feel its waves of heat

Then shadows rippling through the corn  
are its waves passing  
radiated from the sun  
out through the waves of cornstalks

Suddenly  
A bird rises from the field

against the sun  
it loses outline and is gone

a flake of ash  
bursting from a furnace blown  
from a fire aloft  
fluttering to an incandescence  
and melting in the air

What will the cornfield be  
without fire  
beneath the nacre of the moon?

That night I went out by myself

Let myself out the back door

quietly so as not to wake the others still asleep

I eased the screen door shut  
and stepped out on the back porch steps

The chill and damp night air cold September

sweet and clear

I breathed up toward the sky

my breath a windowpane of smoke

The back porch steps were slippery with hoar-frost  
and the grass was white with icy dew

walking through it wet my shoes  
my feet were chilled  
and gradually my toes stung with the cold  
I went out through the back yard moving across the lot  
the moon above me as I went

The moon was full and white  
and shining on the silent road  
and on the dark hills and the black fields

Here everything was silent  
the night completely still

My footsteps were so loud with the crunch and rasp  
of gravel

A loose stone kicked from underfoot  
shot like a tiddlywink  
across the road  
bounced and clinked  
with a sound like a dropped coin

The autumn moon shone down  
fluorescent white and silvery white  
and ringing in the silence like a bell

In the moonlight the cornfield was black stubble  
charred sticks in rows  
cinders of a fire

A field of charcoal complex ashes  
burned looking plowed earth

with the moon above

over all the blue moonlight

I lay down in the grass  
the cold wet soaked my back and then

I felt its cold seep into me  
I wiped my hands on the thick grass  
and rubbed the icy water on my face

freezing myself out of my life

I lay a while there looking up at stars  
that slowly turned  
in a region of darkness

The earth seemed gradually to drift

At moments I felt that I was staring up  
at scattered sparks of light moving like a dance  
become geometry  
the fabled music that one reads about

I felt the earth as a single thing beneath me  
both large and small  
unlimited and infinite  
full of powers and yet somehow desolate

known and unknown always

The sun at noon    it is intolerably bright

I walk outside    Where is the fire?  
                         there must be fire somewhere for this heat

                                 But no  
                         it was the end of summer  
and cicadas simmer in the field which is burning itself out

And on the road every particle of sand  
                         is like a particle of light    so many particles of light

I am so fearfully made

What must it be    my hand against the sun    X-rayed?

I almost see the bones

                         just as soldiers did at the Bikini atoll blast

Not the infinite  
                         but the intricate is fear itself

And hatred is a very complex thing  
                         love is always simple    but hatred

is infinitely intricate    and

The labyrinth of beauty leads one

Finally

To oneself again    Becomes oneself again

None may him hide  
    from death hollow-eyed  
Nor from sickness either  
    his twin brother

    The rain came down  
        repeatedly today  
  
rainy rainy day

    Each time it fell  
        with a heavy drumming sound on the roof

It flooded every gutter  
    the street itself flowed with gray streams

        with a white mist  
sometimes with torn-down leaves

there was a kind of frying sound in the gutters

    in the air something was building up

And yet the street itself gets washed right out  
    all gets carried in the currents of the rain

Today we stayed indoors  
    to keep out of the downpour  
stayed in these dark rooms  
    we rent with what we have

our life our only life



Timeless

a nascent and still obscured intelligence

and in that place of twilight  
I was as yet an insubstantial being  
and without circumstance of self or knowledge  
action or activity

And at this early hour one bead of rain –

depending from the tip of leaf  
or icy blade of grass  
not yet made to glitter in the sun  
a trembling and crystalline drop  
virtual diamond that must belie  
its utmost fragility –

has only grey twilight now, the world half-lit

Resurgence gradually comes into me  
but only since I had conceived it first  
Had dreamed my resurrection  
in the darkness  
like a seed in soil  
So that the green shoots building in the dark

move upward arching

Break in these white blossoms  
flowers of the mind

My many words  
like petals of incarnate speech

And likewise sunrise gradually erupts  
the slantwise corridors of violet and red are tinting

everything  
The orange and yellow breaking up the ground in which I lay  
And darkness silence stillness  
are disrupted in points of new activity

the paper foldings of the paper world unfold  
realness comes forth  
dimensions breathe

I come forth from my sleep and walk out in the  
orange obscurity of dawn

I walk out on the grass still cold  
and wet and I'm still cold and wet

And on one side the sun shines on me as I walk along

Awake now and move in the present moment  
the light says this to me  
I must attend to it alone

There can be no falling off from strength if you do that

Powers

powers  
powers these alone are good  
conserve touch sources elusive  
yet available

Move in the current time

the present place

among the powers that gather to this moment

the grass blades  
sparkling from the rain

Where is death then? What is it to you now?

But which and how many? metaphors  
can keep you in the present  
the poise of passing knowledge

the beauty of unhesitating grace?

So many doors that block reality  
so many keys to open them

For birth and death must always be dreamed first

And having had the dream  
now lay hold to the world through action and activity

And so I know of access to another life  
as though I had become deeply willing to believe in it

And so likewise you know another life

I want pure contact  
but not with any substance  
of whatever kind

I want experience itself  
but no image of it

To think of neither life nor death

neither

but to participate in this intensity  
and be the moving center of these transformations

These transformations that I cannot name but yet suggest

And the intensity which also has no name  
and can't be known

except by being touched  
possessed

heard and seen and felt

## BOOK TWO: POSSESSION

### I

Choruses of the dead come to me as I sleep, they speak  
and I hear them

Spectral loves, heavenly loves, solar spirits, angels  
moving, mingling, intertwining, separating

I hear them and I rise from sleep, no longer in my bed  
but in a place of darkness nonetheless

And the fallen move around me in their dance together,  
turning in their morris of darkness

But how did I come here? By what door did I have  
entrance to this place?

### II

The room was darkened, shadows cut across the bed and  
dresser and the chair, and at the corner of the blinds  
there was a mitered crease of light

We were among the shadows on the bed, we lay there  
quietly together

And she had fallen into a dream, although not totally  
asleep, on her face the slightest smile, a rapt and  
attentive expression; she was possessed by what I  
could not know

Though I could sense the stir of half-lit consciousness  
as yet not sunk too far from where it played across  
her face, across closed eyes

Like still dark water that betrays not one trace of the  
movement deep beneath which yet you know is  
there

In the shifting of an arm or leg, in the tremor of an  
eyelid, in the briefest shade of mood across her  
brow

I felt the trace of quick intelligence and intricate desire,  
the opening and turning of some movement  
harbored there

My breath did not cloud the glass of her skin, I left no  
fingerprint

But my whole body listened, I was an open ear placed to  
the thin reverberating wall that was her form

### III

This moment, now so full of light, flows, it is a wave  
An impetuous energy burning us together –

We are apart from all without –

Day incandescent at the window  
The million atoms of sunlight  
Showering abundant radiance through burning space  
without measure

But that is all outside, for here there is  
just our involving space

Creating stillness turning on the drifting point of rapt  
attention

To one face, to this one Other

In this augmented peace  
Deepening to an inward and burgeoning excitement –

Knotted and unknotted –

And opening at last  
its petals of white foam

Its oracles of light in the hearkening ear –

Time dissolves,  
is just a breath  
between our lips –

Our bodies borne and turning  
on the moment's crest

Burning through this transfixed hour  
On the becalmed incandescence  
the light contained within these walls

Within our now discovered bodies  
Naked and ardent in their own true fire

In the turning of a moment  
We have turned to face each other  
to serve one deep intent

But desire being infinite  
we have to turn again

In this space left here, however,  
When we lie at rest, adrift in a temporary peace

I cannot help but wonder at your beauty

So, baffled, and obscurely moved by this –  
For better or for worse  
I start to speak again

You listen as I speak into the dust mote teaming light

#### IV

The summer evening burning down, the field  
darkening to sunset  
The grass a luminous orange-rust in slanting light

I stood by the twisted barbed wire fence  
And watched the sun burning itself out  
And felt the advancing quiet

This gradually became the sounds of night

I heard the birds from the edge of the nearly dark wood  
And in the field-side marsh the bull frogs thrummed  
With a sound like rubber bands

Every now and then a light breeze blew and tapped  
the leaves

I thought of other summers, of a line  
Of summers reaching forward, another reaching back  
From where I stood, meditating  
Playing with the images of time

Some way off, the brushy tops of the grass  
Had a faint amber glow, a scattering of embers reflecting  
the sun's warmth

Step by step the shadows deepened, spread  
And everything was night

The nearest trees  
Were a coast of dense blackness against the deep blue  
of the sky  
The field a vague area not really visible

White points of stars drifted through the sky

And then, after a while, the breeze picked up  
And brought the sweet scent of damp earth,  
the feel of chill grass  
And a hint of the cool night coming on

I breathed it in, that beautiful and partially disturbing scent  
Standing in the wood side darkness hearing

The stir, the whisper of the trees  
The being and strange activity of summer night

## V

It was earlier in the evening, I had walked  
The wooded slopes that border on the field  
It was the early part of sunset  
The light came through the leaves in sparks and flashes  
Struck down its dusty spotlights here and there  
Where filaments of bright floss floated in the rays

I kept on walking, moving through the trees  
The light was blinking – now, now, now –  
Through openings in the trees' green leaves,  
Leaf covering leaf blotting the straight sun

And in the overhang of leaves there was  
A translucent green and yellow green, luminous,  
Suffused with haloes, splotted  
With darker shoals, leaf shades and branch  
silhouettes and limb shadows

A basilica of green light and yellow light  
All masoned with leaf tiles and cemented with bright  
sunlight  
But every now and then a spoke of light sparked in through  
all of it –  
A flare, and then green twilight massed again

And then once more -- to catch the eye just so --  
I'm blind a moment, the world gone in a flash

And then it all returns

So I continued through the regions of green light

## VI

Axle-tree and yew tree  
Tree of birth and death  
Tree of turning nights and days  
Tree of final night or final day

Tree of sunshine  
And green shadow  
Tree of shadow  
And black shade

Supporting branches  
And entangling vines  
Inverted crotch of birth  
Turned to the sky

Leaves that catch the sun  
And funnel it to earth  
The tributaries of the light  
Drawn like rain into the ground

From the center of the sun and the flash-bulb  
After-image which the sun is

And the countless geometries clamorous with light

Space takes root it is  
A thousand branches  
burning

in inextinguishable fires

The light is flakes of incandescence flames  
Which are the leaves

See

They fall in the flare of mirror shards

Or in the glittering activity of waves

In the light and space unlimited of the afternoon

They fall without end  
This burning

burning

burning

has no end

Earth streams in the sunny February thaw  
It steams in the cold of early March  
Just starting to awaken  
to smolder with spring heat

The waterfall steams  
a continuous nimbus

Of water and vapor and light

Ice steams in the sun  
and becomes water

Earth steams in the sun  
and turns to mud

And mud steams  
and is both earth and water

So that

Earth and water become fire in the air of spring

## VII

Now the season was fall, not summer and not spring

October's sun was gold upon the wooden floor

We lay together there, just waking from  
Our unexpected sleep to find the day –

The choruses of light came to me as I slept  
Singing chanting whispering

radiating light and cold

And warmth came into me

And there were voices in my ear

The sound of this light  
Woke me to a deeper depth of calm

A clarity like sleep suffused with knowledge  
Though still I slept

And in my dream you came to me

Now newly present, you are this body of living warmth  
This perfect light one cannot see but only feel

I feel it on my face, I know it in my mind  
It reaches to my heart, a light

Not of the surface of the skin, but felt and known  
In those dimensions of luminous grace

Which you possess within and so create around you,  
Like a sheer white curtain which dilates in warm breeze

All light is present in those realms of coloration  
That your skin possesses when I study it

A light which is your body's warmth  
And seems to draw my eye at last, to lead it on

To lead it deeper in, as one suggestion  
Of glimpsed presence disappears, disperses

Denies itself behind emerging depths of warmth,  
Of opal and of rose and luminous tan

I would go deeper still, but I am always stopped,  
The ritual always dissipates at last

For if this seeing is desire, desire  
Is a tide which too must ebb, recede

Into the unlit depths and waters of the unlit world

My eye awoke to just the blank white sheet

Its mountainous crumples, wrinkles, creases  
Rough against my cheek, just barely warm on your side

And with the faded perfume of your body

But you were gone

## VIII

I lay beside you listening as you slept  
My body, my entire being but an ear

I listened where the sea rushed  
In its choruses of waves

Its million voices hurrying, going nowhere  
In that silence my ear a smaller shell

Placed to that breathing and reverberant wall –  
How could it take in all, where time

Itself flowed in the currents  
Of your blood, incarnate time?

My ear itself a shell, auricular  
Eddy whorl of time

Against the slight shell of your body,  
Which is itself an echo of some other time

I listened to the echoing of worlds,  
The hollow rushing sound within the night's  
dark space

It was like distant water moving or the small voice  
Of the sea, which is not really there

The sound grown faint and nearly lost, so far away  
Recessed so deep within, distant

And yet gradually more clear  
What was it that I heard or did not hear

But felt at first, only in my mind?  
A stirring in the darkness

Of approaching sleep, moving gradually  
In tension newly animate, excitement now awakening

And gathering in the body – desire  
It was desire for your beauty, for your soul, for you

And so through this erotic door I entered  
By the outspoken lips of a shell –

The sources opened and I moved through them

## IX

I woke in darkness in an airless space  
In which I couldn't stand, nor sit upright  
Nor turn onto my side, nor move at all

Some weight had pinned me like a moth to board  
But covered in deep earth, entangled roots  
Enwrapped and gripped my legs and held them dead

There was a hand upon my face that smothered me  
As with an ether cloth you can't push off  
Forcing nauseating giddiness and dreams

On you, and in the dream I had I shouted –  
Loud, but could not shout myself awake  
For I was trapped, immovable weight of earth

Upon my chest, on my face, pressing down  
At length I ceased, and then the dream ceased too  
And I awoke, but to that same dark place

But after some vague length of time, when I  
Had given up all efforts to get free,  
All thought or movement, all desire or will

The bottom of that airless closet space  
Turned into rotted wood and crumbling dirt  
And broke up under me like thawing ice

And I fell through into what seemed a well  
Or like an endless elevator shaft,  
Though narrow, and then narrowing some more

Until the walls closed in and scraped my sides –  
My arms, my face and legs, my back –  
There wasn't anything I could protect

But all was scraped and burned; it felt as though  
A thousand wire brushes scoured me,  
And then a thousand tingling points of fire

I tried to shout once more or swear out loud  
Against whatever dragged me back this way,  
For now I knew that I was being dragged

Or hauled backward or sucked in through a tube  
And yet I still was falling fast, so fast –  
A backward plunge although no longer down –

Directionless -- which gradually became  
A sort of turning, drifting, near stasis  
Suspended in an area of cold –

A sudden blankness, freezing, ultraviolet,  
In which I tumbled like an astronaut  
Slowly – weightless, calm – and then I saw:

My skin had been abraded, my flesh ripped off  
Was drizzling away in gouts and clots  
Of blood and crimson streams and particles

I watched it gradually disintegrate  
Just as a drop of ink in water breaks  
Apart then spreads, dispersing in small dots

And smears and faintest veils and then is gone,  
So did my flesh break up, my blood dissolve  
In veils fainter and then fainter still

Until the final veil of the flesh  
At length was rendered totally transparent –  
Burning, non-existent, and I stepped through

How can I begin to tell what this was like?  
Neither of body nor of mind, neither  
An innate impetus and power which

I'd held within the body I had had  
Now moved diminished in its warmth and scope,  
No longer implicated in external space

No longer moving in the realm of time  
Yet clarified by virtue of simplicity  
And made in this obscurely more intense

Then everything began to move at once  
No longer soil, clods of dirt or stones  
But thick mud, black as coffee grounds and cold

It was the medium through which I moved  
I was a swimmer in an unlit sea  
Which gradually became a viscous oil

The color of black ink, but like molasses  
It poured gradually, though I could feel  
It building up a current as it went

It flowed with a stronger pull, but faster  
Drawing me in a graduated arc  
Around and around more and faster still

The dense blackness thinned out by degrees  
An inexplicable and seeping warmth --  
That came from nowhere like a sudden flush

Then seemed to permeate and break it up  
Like turpentine dissolving oil paint  
Until it was just water, starred water

With darker elements floating here and there  
Like curdles in bad milk or bits of wood  
Or rafts of seaweed in the midnight sea

The current bore me in a faster arc  
Which steadily increased, and I was like  
A cork afloat upon strange currents now

Full of green lights, cat's eye phosphorescence  
Now changing, transforming to a deep violet  
Like dawn coming slowly to the sky

A green translucent theatre of light  
Arched like a dome of green ice over me  
And in the center straight up over me

A small grey sun shone smaller than the moon  
Smaller than a dime, an ashen grey  
And smudged with black, like a burnt out light bulb

I scooped a handful of the water up  
It too was green, no longer streaming red  
But crystalline transparent green shot through

With points of fire and flecks of colored light  
Like the spirituous light inside a diamond  
Or the prisms in the iris of the eye

I noticed that a few drops in my hand  
Held bright yellow flecks like pollen grains  
But when I looked into that remote world

Framed by the giant basin of my palm  
I saw a million protozoan forms,  
Animals of delicate translucent shape

White, intricate and gauzy, like figures  
Cut in fine glass, luminous, unclouded  
And with a strange light source behind their skin

They drifted in their own realm, I in mine  
I watched through panes of lucid water  
As through the lenses of a microscope

And when I looked more closely I could see  
The protozoan forms I had observed  
Were really parts of bodies, fetus-size

White arms and legs – tiny – filled with light  
And every now and then a whole fetus,  
The living phosphorescence of the sea

A kind of glowing plankton all around,  
The water filled with sparks and flakes of light  
Like radium-glowing dials, numbers

So many lights obscured those greenish depths  
I gazed into the levels of darkness  
Lit by a yellow light from deep within

## X

I found myself in a dark place which yet was not my grave  
And I was asked,

Of all you might desire, what do you desire most, what do  
you desire now?

And I, though changed in the sublime non-being of the  
dead remembered everything I might have had

Of all things women's beauty was most beautiful, the form  
of woman and their loveliness

Her face, her hair and her lingering perfume, her grace of  
movement like a curtain swaying in warm breeze

Her presence felt as one feels some incomparable joy

Bring me the beauty of those women whom I loved, I said,  
and of those I wanted and of those I only saw

There was not anything that I could want more than that  
shapely loveliness and light made palpable in them  
and which I felt within me in their presence

And when they came they were not many different women  
and yet they were not one

A living presence filled the confines of the room: a  
single voice yet multiple which altered  
consciousness, became my thought now splintered  
in a million points infinitely divisible, a thousand  
mirrors cracked to show as many faces, which yet  
were all one face

Gradually this went away

Then I was asked, Of all you might desire, what do you  
desire secondly?

And I, haltingly as though puzzling out a language I could  
barely read, remembered everything I once  
had known

Of all things artistry was most my love, most lastingly the  
force and the significance of life

Bring me the essence of all art, I said, bring me the genius  
of apt grace, the animate intelligence of eye and  
hand, of ear and eye, of body and of mind

But such a wish was vain and futile as I found when no one  
answered me and nothing came from my request but  
silence

And gradually this went away

And I was asked, Of all you might desire, what do you  
desire finally?

And I, having by now lost interest in all else, imagined  
some pure origin of beauty. All beauty whether of  
body or of mind must have its source in light, its  
warrant and its final end

Bring me the light itself, I said, not what it shows or  
bright things that reflect and not light's origin, but  
light itself

I imagine a realm where there is only light

## XI

The choruses of light drew near to me  
I heard them whispering, a sound  
Like paper burning, the intensity

Was such I kept my face turned to the ground  
And could not look into that circling of fire  
But felt impaired, and limited, and bound

And as I listened to the burning choir  
The outer husk of consciousness was burned  
Entirely away like paper in a fire

Freed of such constraint it was returned  
To that originality one might surmise  
As prior to all thinking, thought unlearned

Pure mind emancipated from its ties  
To trivial concepts and to trivial men,  
So that my open eyes were opened eyes

I find it hard to say what I knew then,  
And far above my head a glaring aura  
Shifted, in the midst of this a sun

Glowed tiny, clear -- at least I thought I saw  
A distant watery dazzle of sunlight  
Glittering like wet ice in a bright thaw

And then the liquid glimmer turned to white,  
Divided into petals made of snow,  
A flower formed of snow and which despite

Its petals falling just as snowflakes do  
Continually regained what it had lost,  
Its petals always falling, yet still new

I tried then to discern what I still most  
Desired to see -- light's body, light's essence  
Which still I wanted at whatever cost

For what, I thought, was light itself but sense  
Epitomized? And sense could not exist  
But in some form that gave it some substance

Yet light as such could only be expressed  
As light, which being perfect sense itself  
Could only in as perfect form be dressed

Therefore light's body is light's very self,  
Its essence and its soul, under the species  
Of appearance and on the truth's behalf

A grace, and yet clear objectivity, these  
Indicate, and yet cannot define,  
The lucid mystery by which one sees

O image of all beauty and insight  
Model of understanding and delight  
What could be clearer than your clarity, Light?

And so why was it that I saw no sign  
Of what I'd hoped to see? The white rose too  
Was gone, and there was nothing to be seen

## XII

Then in my dream I lay flat on my back  
The song a flickering and distant light  
Grew to an opening apprehension

A sun at the dark root of my brain that rose  
Into a dawning consciousness of light  
The dark behind my eyes dispersed in light

And I awoke to greater consciousness  
More than what any dawn brought when I lay  
In white sheets, in the chrysalis of flesh

For in the region of the dead I saw  
With greater clarity, with an eye untouched  
By love, desire, not even touched by fear

But equanimity and clairvoyance,  
These were my part, such as befits a shade  
I lay there and a voice was in my ear

The forms around me which before had been  
Empty, opaque, and resonant darkness  
Present, and yet totally spectral

Now radiated light from deep inside  
Like coals that hold a glowing heat  
Beneath a thin grey powdery ash film

Out of the light they seemed to veil or guard  
And which I knew was just the outer haze  
Of some deeper and less tolerable source

A voice came which I recognized as song  
Translated to a different mode, not words  
Exactly, but music so expressive

Of deeply buried feeling that it seemed  
Articulate of thought and grew into  
A clarity more clear than any word

Which nonetheless I understood as words  
Spoken from recesses of that light  
And imparting its obscure significance

I heard the influence of cold and light  
The confluence of voices gathering  
Alchemical vibrations to a pool

Of energy that flowed around my form  
Embowered in the shell of comprehending peace,  
Oblivious to darkness and irrelevance

I felt and knew the nature of the real,  
Of light, and time, of movement and of space,  
Of action and activity and death

I heard, 'The moment of the world is energy  
Exfoliating throughout light and space  
And time, all multiplying in new worlds

Of light and space and time, of substance, force  
And movement, of mind and images –  
A match flare in the darkness scatters worlds,

As possibilities diverge from fact,  
Divide and ramify like forking paths  
In realms of night still left unvisited

By thought, though present enigmatically  
In every atom of the stirring dark  
And sensed obscurely, with obscure disquiet

From time to time -- the world is many worlds,  
Is many voices in the eddy-whorl  
Of self and time which is your hearing mind

And are they really there? Why do you ask?  
What does it seem to be? The day is really there,  
Powerful with the movement of light's forms

There's no enigma greater than the fact  
Of that bright sea, a calm and visible power,  
Its infinite potential realized

Instant by instant and point by point  
And yet still held eternally in reserve,  
Touching all things and yet itself untouched

If light, which is the simplest of all things,  
Original of things, most candid thing,  
Takes many forms and some of them obscure

Or baffling like Rothko's floating planes  
Why should not later apparitions be  
More complex and still less accessible

Though less mysterious than this one first thing?  
The world is many worlds, some possess light  
And some have darkened to invisibility

Reality is planes like planes of light  
And shadow, moving planes which intersect,  
Adjoin, face off, through points of space and time

Dimensions interpenetrate like folds  
Which form the petals of a rose  
Vibrations implicated like the plies

Inside a rose – discontinuous, attuned,  
Touching at times and not at other times,  
Related yet not perfectly aligned

Always ajar somehow, somewhat, with gaps  
When meaning seems to fall awry,  
Pattern dispersing into random points –

Like fireflies, their fluid constellations  
Never seen with certainty, revealed  
And dissolved at once against the dark

The quiet summer night, which covers up  
Each trace, though somehow it had sponsored it  
And brought it forth, however passively,

The endless depthless background always there  
Which their brief lights occur against –  
Night, created, uncreated, creating

And uncreating space – the fireflies  
Which lead the eye to find progressive depths  
Of night, dimensions unfolding in the field

In vagrant regions, haunted geometries,  
Yet all dissolve no sooner than they're seen  
Into the darkness which we see them by

The rationale of sight creates its own  
Dark worlds of light, the visible  
A medium like water, or like paint

Or night itself, before the searching eye,  
The energy of seeing meeting thus  
The energy of nature – color, forms,

And breaking waves of near-geometry  
Which move, clash, coalesce, disintegrate  
And are the trace of energies, furies –

Of eye and brain, of body and of mind,  
Amid the nearly overwhelming fate  
Of life in contact inescapably

With light, time, earth, air, and weather – all circumstance  
In this way seeing is a power, a force,  
As much as any other in the world

Since it becomes a door, of many doors,  
Through which one passes, moving from one plane  
Of the enigma to another plane

And likewise hearing is a power as well  
The tale of time is whispered in your ear  
You move, dance, to that melody, though all

You hear is noise, the stupefying clangor  
Deafens you -- obnoxious business of the world,  
To deaden and impair and finally kill

And yet the world is poured in at your ear,  
You are the whirlpool where it spins resolved  
Into the quiet medium of thought

In this way, gently, you control the world,  
By listening, the opening to mind,  
To sense its actual vibration there

And not the spurious dysphoric hum  
And static, but its underlying breath  
And pause – time's unacknowledged character

By listening you know your own breathing  
And feel the movement of your thought  
You plumb the well that is each word, the echoes

Of the word within the listening mind  
Stirring the memory of other words  
And fragments of your superseded lives

By vestiges like doors onto the past  
Through which a long-dormant reality  
Floods into you, a breeze that rises from

The sunlit and abandoned rock garden  
Now glittering with inescapably clear  
Significance which now becomes a part

Of you, yet only by allowing it  
Crediting its impulse to be actual

To listen thus is opening the real  
To life and thought and thought likewise to it,  
The real a fragrance in the air of time

And like a scent that alters consciousness  
Until that is a flower itself, although  
Your head is just a hollow dried seed pod

Yet it becomes a flower, and your life  
Unfolds its green leaves, lives in unfolding  
Until at length it dries and blows away

Yet even so perhaps it still persists  
In realms of memory, the memory  
Of those still left or of the world itself

And therefore listening must open to  
What is not real, to the virtual  
Whose impulse to be real you must intuit

And you yourself are half illusion – air,  
Your life is lighter than the blown milkweed  
It floats, catches the light like intricate dust,

Less stable than the dust itself, no more than air  
And yet for you it's all completely real  
And heavier than lead – dead, dense and dull

What can release you from these boundaries?  
Listening is all, the most moral sense,  
And music the consummation of listening

Music of all things is the most like life  
True music is its emanated breath  
Everything real, compelling your respect

As something genuine in human life  
Creates its own time in that measured world  
Genuine music is the form of life

Where mind and body unify and breath  
Itself involving the remotest cells  
Groups feeling into periodic grace,

Which gathering the energy of words  
Without the words articulates felt thought  
And sounds the silent image of the mind,

Creates a vibrant and illusory presence  
Whose rhythm shapes a virtual body,  
Which is likewise a pure apparent mind

Created in the world of time, presence  
Called forth entirely from sound, a soul  
Of some kind, an illusory Subject --

Luminous with number, measured energy,  
Rational power and calculated breath,  
Living its consummation, never dead,

Completed yet not ended, always new  
However many times returning to  
Its source and motivating origin,

Neither of body nor of mind, yet both  
Conceive it and together bring it forth,  
And as it comes it draws them in its wake

Into a darker confluence of being,  
As mind and body interpenetrate  
Life then is water closing itself up

Divisions you had felt, all vexed duality,  
A ripple or a transitory script  
Traced upon water too substantially one

Seek for your life to have analogous  
Poise, a discipline like that, and strength,  
An independence from all alien

Disturbances, as music can't be touched  
By any noise however loud it be,  
No more than moonlight by loud neon signs

They are two different realms: attune yourself  
To one and put the other one aside  
You have to choose one, so choose listening

Music resolving all duality  
Is thus the highest mode of listening,  
A way of being in the world and time

This is the purpose of true knowledge, to guide  
To know beyond dissension or contempt  
Holding the world just lightly, though deeply

The world is elusive and ungraspable like water  
The task is to be balanced, buoyant, you  
Must give yourself up to it, yet reserve

An inner point of calm, like a match flame  
You keep within yourself, body and mind  
As waves and eddies wash around your form

Yet you're accustomed to the medium  
Its sovereign ever-present gentlest strength  
Its currents and the consequence of these

Yet there, suspended and of course alone  
You must drift half intentionally toward grace  
And gather strength from what flows all around

You there: you will have balance then  
And certainty of self-integrity  
Which is a style of managing process

And unforeseen events; for though you have  
The passages of sense and intellect  
And that deep complex sense, your life itself

You move by steps in darkness, routes of night  
And currents of mysterious import  
Which intricately weight your concrete life

Your mind and body – sensuous and perplexing powers –  
Forcing and upsetting balances, so that  
Your life must constantly restore itself

Therefore treat all things with respect and tact  
Listening is crucial, feeling through every sense –  
For every sense must listen and then see

We bring the risen powers of the mind  
The risen senses of the body's life  
That now are like seeds planted in its soil

These growing, branching out in all sciences  
Are realizing consciousness throughout  
All realms of being, searching out the sun

A manifold yet single knowledge-tree  
Seeking with its swaying head and crown  
To catch that very close yet distant light

All doors will lead one to reality,  
For everything's a door – you are yourself,  
Every part and faculty a door

The only question then is, will you step  
Across the minor threshold of yourself  
Opening magic casements, dark windows

That when they're dark give only your own face  
Back to your gaze? So open them toward night  
To touch the dark and partially unknown

Realities not part of self-concern  
Opening self-hood toward the actual  
As breathing opens to the world and balances

Inward involvement with accepting space  
Purpose and secrecy and growth with mere  
Duration, placing its music there

You open the back porch window – the night air  
Spills in with its cool dampness, with the scent  
Of elderberry and the mid-June grass

For that one instant night is just perfume  
Diffused in darkness, while the stars drift off  
Sparkling coldly through the maple's leaves

And at that moment you can't quite recall  
Which is the inside of the window – night  
Has taken hold, as inside moves out toward

The dark realm which at any rate has flowed  
In through the screen you press your nose against,  
Its cold metallic veil against your lips

Deadens things a moment, though the stars  
Still drift, the cool breeze still stirs through  
the leaves,  
Dark and shimmering in the random gusts

### XIII

Then just outside the window, the dark tree  
(What kind is it?) was shaking all its leaves,

And I awoke and found that night had come.  
Thinking, I lay beside you in the bed. You slept,

And in the moonlight the tree's black shape  
Was fluttering and shaking on the floor,

And like a madwoman tossing her wild hair  
And thrashing in an epileptic fit

It writhed and twisted in the darkness there  
Yet never could escape from its night-world

Of twining serpents – torn like an oracle,  
Tormented and ecstatic, intoxicated

With moonlight, its shadows interweaving  
Like writhing water snakes, black water,

Sinuously turning in their morris near  
The surface of the glimmering night pool –

A depthless, substanceless, a moonlit world  
Rising upon us as we fall toward sleep,

So that you seemed an image of deep peace,  
Of a dark and concrete breathing mystery –

Your body's life -- here tempered by completeness  
To a human dignity, the effortless

Completion of the body by incarnate mind,  
Hidden in its silence, yet of which each breath

Is but the physical echoing and musical  
Expression, though never a fulfillment –

Mind realized in body, body in mind,  
Awaiting the fulfillment of the day.

The shadows of the trees outside are ink  
Against the deep blue of the sky, and on

The moonlit floor the shadows of the trees  
Are ink spilled out, the moonlight like a dew.

And cool night air has dampened the window  
Left partly open to the chilly night.

Night air flows in, and yet we cannot mind  
Since we're at home in it. The floor is cold,

The night moves slowly and the stars drift round  
Like points of light along our walls.

And time is something totally benign.  
How beautiful time is! This is the time.

How – with what a startling clarity – you are at peace  
Beside me here, your very life apparent,

Stunningly disclosed even while  
You lie here breathing quietly.

And even now I have the feeling that  
We've never been so subtly attuned –

I to you and you likewise to me. Although  
You neither look nor see, you seem

Yet to be subliminally aware,  
And in a sense to be deeply listening,

As though with your whole being.  
A cool and early autumn scent

Has come into the room,  
An essence in the clear night air.

You know all this, feel all in every breath,  
In this your hour of sleep here at my side,

A sweet scent like a grove, a token of the time  
We have together here, we two enclosed within

The space of our two solitudes now one,  
Here in the fragile pause of time, this hour.

How all things seem to tend toward us  
As we lie here in mutual and balanced peace,

You sleeping there, and I awake, and you  
More enigmatically awake than I,

I watching through the window the dark sky,  
The precise and many stars, the night's slowness,

While you attend to other patterns  
Hidden in the movement of your inner night

Where cosmos upon cosmos balances,  
The hidden stars and sun and moon your own.

My hand upon your hip is my contact  
With powers partially disclosed in sleep

And partially disclosed to waking thought,  
So that the two of us participate

In this completion and renewal of  
The music of our life continually renewed –

I by active thinking, passively,  
And you, though passive and asleep, active.

The sky alters to green and violet gradually,  
My shadow on the white sheet, very faint at first,

Darkens to a definite grey silhouette  
Against the plain white cotton tinted now

By twilight to a pallid lavender,  
Yet still the shadow is just a faint aura.

At dawn the stars fall one by one, as leaves  
Fall from a tree, as slowly, point by point,

The last faint embers in the cooling grate  
Go out and leave white ashes and a few  
charred sticks.

## XIV

I looked and saw the day had come, the earth  
Lay open to the light, the hillside grass  
Was dark green in the early morning sun,  
The air was cool and damp from late-night rain  
And treetops dipped and wavered in the breeze.  
The shadow of each fence post round the yard  
Was black and more than double the post's length,  
Wet grass flashed and sparkled in the light  
And orange sunlight glittered from between  
dark leaves.

On the hill the grass was still wet from the rain,  
Catching sun-flashes in the roadside ditch;  
The chicory and clover and brown thistles  
Held bright water drops that fell or splattered off  
When the leaves were shaken in the gusting breeze.

The puddles in the veins of sandy mud  
Reflected the light purple of the sky  
At sunrise – blue bars of clouds spread high  
In early morning wind and cold and lit  
At their high altitude with bright pink light.

I slipped out from the bed, took my clothes  
From the chair and then went downstairs.

The downstairs room was full of morning light,  
Sunrise streaming through the window's glass,  
A beautiful unearthly light – pink-orange,  
Unlimited and filling the whole room.  
The polish of the table, the oak floor –  
All caught sharp bits of sun.

I turned away and walked out toward the back  
And stepped out on the porch – the wooden steps  
Were slippery with icy dew. And though  
The backyard faces west and so couldn't  
Catch all the sun as yet, the day was there.  
The morning light was rising like a mist  
Out of the garden's not yet frozen soil,  
The frost a prism web along the grass,  
And near the field, past the wire fence  
A ground fog lingered like an icy smoke.

Light gathered and condensed, became a mist  
Upon the green of saplings and grape vines  
That tangled in crazed knots, on tall brush grass  
Illuminated in the slanted light  
And on tall burdock, full of black shadows  
In the red-orange glare, and the browned milkweed.

Now things stood out with clarity: green leaves  
And amber plumes of goldenrod, and creeper vines,  
The light an active presence, changing dusk to dawn,  
And through the leaves still shining with wet  
The sun fell on the tree crowns and high boughs  
Brightening an area – a rippling  
Of daylight and reflected shine on leaves.  
And all the while the wind had blown steadily,  
Clattering the leaves that swayed and tossed  
And agitating the treetops now lightly grey.

The sun they catch is brighter now, straight on,  
Is getting higher and the light  
Is metal filaments among the leaves,  
Bright webs like spider silk  
Among the brightening and moving boughs.

Yet even as the day comes one can feel  
The pure sufficient power of this moment now,  
Just as light touches every ice crystal  
Or white grass blade or curled leaf  
Beaded with the melted frost,  
Before the presence of the noon – albeit  
Autumn's noon, warm with gold light, mild air  
That has a scent like warm champagne  
From half fermented apples on the ground,  
The still charged air in autumn light  
With wasps hovering through the afternoon,  
Before all this -- the feeling of a pause,  
Of forces poised; how clearly one can sense this.

I break a sprig of dark green basil leaf,  
Now a cigar-like brown or khaki green  
Curled and tea-splotched with frost, so crisp  
It dryly flakes away in dust and bits.  
I roll it in my hand till nothing's left  
Except the spine and a sweet basil scent  
That lingers on my hand like old perfume,  
A token of the life of summer  
Left here like a memory and seed,  
The garden's old sachet and potpourri –  
Tomato leaf and withered pepper plant  
And crumpled basil, and the dry dark mint,  
The stiff and dried-out leaves, vines like straw,  
Soft rattling seed pods, pinto-splotched,  
Tapping the wood stake, the dried, yellowed,  
Scrolled-up leaves the color of old parchment,  
No longer broad and green to catch the sun  
Or sticking to my shirt back as I crouched  
At work beneath their shadow canopy.

And yet this present moment is not less  
Than any summer's day. I live in time

And must incorporate this memory,  
Balance it, complete it, live it out,  
As summer likewise gathered up the spring  
And brought it to completion, realized  
And superseded in its hot still days.

So every moment of our life in time  
Must have its origin in memory.  
Each atom of the light and air right now  
Is like a seed adrift which must take root  
So that it might bring forth evolving worlds.

I walk back through the side yard littered  
With fallen plums that lie in the wet grass  
And nearly slip on one I squash beneath  
My shoe, and lose my balance in its muck  
That smears beneath me, treacherous as grease.  
The sweet ferment of rotting fills the air  
As I pass through the circle of windfalls.  
The icy dew has melted on the back porch steps  
And left small puddles and bright water beads.  
The light is clearer in the kitchen where the sun  
Shines on the clock above the stove – it's eight.

The house no longer shifts or settles,  
Nor does the stair I climb give any creak  
Or crack beneath my step, but everything  
Is clear, confirmed, solid in morning light.  
The blond oak floor gleams back the morning sun  
And the white wainscot is the equivalent of light,  
Clean and sober paint shining. The old door  
Opens softly as I step back in and see  
That you're awake yourself and getting up.  
The curtains are still drawn, though the shade  
Breathes outward with fresh gusts of air, the sun  
Is like bright glass shards on the window frame,

The floor's no longer damp with night-time damp,  
Although the window sill is wet: I close  
The window against the draft then open up  
The curtains and the day comes fully in.

## **XV**

Three things combine to balance us in the movement of  
our life: the stillness and activity of mind, its utopia  
of calm and luminous motion.

For light at length is born within the mind and makes its  
own realm there, its own life and activity, as the  
Word created space from less than space.

Then, secondly, the beauty of the time and place when light  
on anything creates the world anew and leads one  
by the beauty of such light beyond language.

The third thing is our body and the earth itself, the  
touchstone of all sanity, the place of life and theatre  
of education played out for one glimpse, one  
recognition, of the real.

It asks of you one question: Will you know the real once, at

least, in your brief lifetime?

For the world is always other than it seems.

Then think of only highest things.

For the ages of illusion end; the time of all such things

must end.

And the ages of hatred end as well. The time of all such

things must pass away.

I imagine a time when there will be just light.

To hold to neither life nor death, neither;

To be confined to neither concrete nor to virtual,

But to participate in their intensity

And be the moving center of their transformations,

In balance, buoyancy in the process of the living world

Which always, finally, is light.

For the light is either born here or, imprisoned,

reigns here in freedom.

### BOOK THREE: TENEBRAE

#### I

*In darkness I lie down*

The night was empty, freezing in the cold room  
All around me, over me, within me  
And silence over the entire town,  
For it was winter and the town lay under ice,  
Outside the snow was sparkling on the ground,  
The roofs were laden with a weight of snow  
And ice, old ice now stained a dirty brown  
Hung in stalactites from the house's eaves  
And from the undersides of cars.  
Far off the river shrunk beneath the ice  
Flowed in its frozen death;  
The temperature was twenty-five below  
And every taken breath  
Went up in white smoke to the winter stars.

I lay there thinking in the empty room  
And listened to its ticking silence  
Echoing the toys of thought  
That occupied my mind with their small sound.  
It was not just the absence  
Of every sound except the clock's,  
The deprivation of that room  
So dark and so completely still  
Was like a deprivation of all active sense,  
Annihilation of desire,  
Complete renunciation of the will.

The radiator clanged and knocked,  
I thought it might be warmer soon,  
I thought I might rise from my bed

To watch the night sky through the frozen pane  
And so I did,  
And when I did the room disturbed  
By steps across the creaking floor  
Was altered suddenly  
Then settled down into the winter's deep indoor  
Steam-heated ticking quiet;  
The open bed  
Shone dimly white, my watch still ticked  
In winter silence, and silently my thoughts ran riot  
In my head.

My thoughts ran over open fields  
That shone a dark blue in the night  
And fell away on every side  
Into the black of distance and bare woods;  
Completely cancelled by the ice and snow,  
Half-lit and terrible and barren in the moon's  
bright light  
The fields with their winter silence, winter darkness,  
death and cold,  
Presented blank appalling emptiness.

I pressed my cheek against the frozen glass  
And saw the stars shine in its shallow depth.

And then I saw in my mind's eye  
The drifted snow the wind shaped into waves  
And saw the glittering puffs and eddy whorls  
Raised up by sudden gusts  
And then subsiding once again.  
The cold had frozen stiff the barbed wire fence  
Which glimmered icily, shining in moonlight,  
And as my mind went farther  
I could see the woods where darkness was  
Complete, disorienting, black,

The trees a labyrinth extending farther in  
And reaching deeper back to a darkness  
Absolute and more alien still.  
The snow had no more light in it,  
The trees stood there all gaping limbs, all totally silent  
Though in my vision  
Everything I saw  
Seemed silently to scream out emptiness and death.

And yet there was no sound at all,  
No real sound of wind  
Nor yet the slightest creaking of a bough.  
I felt somehow  
That everything should move or swirl around  
The center that I was  
Like some concentric maelstrom,  
Or otherwise that there should be  
A reeling and a spinning from that very spot,  
As though all things were toppling, fleeing to the edge  
Away from the insistent savage knot of hatred and of  
calculating fear  
Which I now was.

I felt  
The vomiting up of every particle of being,  
Of the world in general and of my very self;  
With frozen hands I felt my numbed and mask-like face.

At such a time  
One wants something to happen,  
Some help to come  
Someone to be there.  
But there is only darkness  
And the frozen air,  
Yourself alone.

And then I ran  
And tried to run beyond the dark of trees;  
Snow was cloud-like underneath my feet,  
I couldn't feel the ground; my feet and hands  
Were numb, my face, a rubbery mask,  
Was going slowly dead.

And then  
I fell and snow was in my mouth  
And down my neck, although I felt no cold.

And turning on my back I hardly felt  
The earth beneath me as I lay face up

And staring at the blank and starry night.  
The stars turned silently above the earth,

The earth turned slowly in its place, and I  
Was borne upon its dead and silent surface

As though upon some water finally,  
Definitively stilled, or on some darkness

Like an ice flow in the midnight sea,  
Without sound or movement; I knew

The dark suppression, the stilling of all sense,  
A hushing quiet, suppression

Of everything I thought of as myself,  
Of everything I felt as present life,

Unraveling of intellect and flowing out of sense  
To darkness, blank opacity, irrelevance,

Immersion and dispersal of a scattered

Or a crumbling face, the mouth now dribbling,  
Paralytic, its insignificant breath,

The turning of a tide away from life  
and from the world itself.

What was the world itself? A small dead place  
Of cold and darkness turning round and round,

Of close or distant meaningless small lights  
That moved along the edges of the hill

And seemed to drift around my face.  
Or was this just my dream, or just the snow?

I couldn't tell, things had grown  
Too cold, too silent, although they had been loud,

Extremely loud with my own hard breath  
Or with loud breathing throughout all the sky –

What were the shouts I heard? –

And as that breath intensified I reached  
To touch that throat, to touch the rush of air,

But there was nothing out there where I reached.  
My hand fell heavily against my face,

The snow was over me, the tiny lights,  
Were moving rapidly away, and then

My face was gradually closed up in deep darkness  
And the snow around me slowly closed as well.

My eyes were sightless and my face grew stiff and  
fixed,  
The snow was just a concept and the small  
Small lights were gone, the shouts were gone,  
A voice cried once and sounded far away, unreal.  
My face and only that was left there in the dark.

## II

I lie in darkness in the empty room  
And meditate events  
Which brought me here,  
Attempting futilely to track the path, the arc of life,  
Events –  
And meditate the nature of that chain,  
That memory of times of places and of acts  
Which you, I, we  
Tell over and again  
To come back where we started from –  
The crossing, the crossroads, the intersection,  
An hour and a place.

And likewise I must think of that which meditates –  
What is it? Who can tell?  
What of this waking eye?

I know the floor is dark  
Is like a kind of plane  
Where darkness is

From which it rises  
Like a tide that floods around me  
Filling the whole room and taking everything

My eye  
A single point of consciousness,  
Minute spark of phosphorescence  
In the silent sea

Is this the end of every route –  
Every road  
Brings one at last to this?

Above, the blank of darkness not construable  
Below, more darkness, another night  
In midst of these  
Suspended like a single dim light  
The eye of selfhood and its meditative sleeplessness

It is the smallest margin  
Separating void from void conceivable  
The future from the past  
-- The present emptied as a thing of no account –

The actual and the conceivable  
Are kept apart, or joined,  
by virtue of this empty space

Yet since it is an empty space  
And knows itself as such  
The eye must close in sightless peace at length  
As you move inward, downward

To the place of more intense and most intense  
sadness

The very thing you are  
The essence of reality  
The sentiment, the feel and the sight of things  
All these are given up and finally are gone

Yet what remains amid this process of removal?

I light a candle and then drop the match  
Into the liquid wax pooled at the bottom of the jar –  
A small hiss, then it snuffs and smokes,  
Lies there shriveled, black, embalmed

Yet a candle is lit with its own light

The process of my life  
Creates another elsewhere, an apparent complement,  
Shadowing or hidden, foreign to me, hypothetical,  
A self I am creating for myself  
And so not foreign, deeply intimate rather  
But obscurely so, a riddle which I try  
To understand, a puzzle, an enigma facing me;  
Perhaps it is the total of one's words,  
The total of one's thoughts and of one's acts,  
The trace one leaves upon the world,  
And if none on the world, then on the void

The sacred void, accepting,  
Unthinkable, incommunicable

Plenum of pure absence, the deep and depthless pool

This therefore is my only light  
Devoted more to shadows than to light  
And shadow's ambiguities,  
The ivory colored candle in its jar

Fan-shape of light  
                    Against one wall  
Touching the corner of the ceiling

The light – tremulous, subtle  
Like the surface of a water drop

Active, unstill  
Its beige light on the wall  
Is like a theatre in which the shadow of a hand  
Might quiver up, swell  
Cover all an instant, and then slide away

Shadows tremble with a flame-like animation

It is a theatre of mind  
A kind of inner eye which sees  
A fragile vibratory blur, as when  
Daylight quivers in your all but closed eyelashes

My hand is raised a moment,  
Darts into frame, then out again

This is a realm of pure forms, of ideas –  
As this one, for example, the idea  
Of a hand which though much like a hand  
Cannot harm anyone, and likewise  
All the forms apparent here  
Are forms of human gesture, human thought –  
The shadow of a hand, a head  
An arm, a lamp, a coffee cup  
                    These things are all quite harmless  
Yet all are in the dark and of the dark  
Enclosed, although  
Their realm of apparition is dim light

Insubstantial things, empty diagram  
They have their only being in darkness

The area in which they are, the light,  
Is nothing but a world -- small, delicate,  
And islanded in night

And so, much like a world, it too can be put out

### III

My room is nothing but a clutter of old books  
Papers, the moon  
Does not shine in on closed blinds and drapes  
Candle and light  
My sleeplessness

Floating weightless stelleda, massive  
Tranquil and suffused  
With Rembrandt's radiance, a light  
That pulses slowly as its planes advance  
Or drift in muted confrontation of the spectator

Obscurely standing for some ritual now dead  
Of which they are a memory and mute cipher

They are at first mere color but become  
A reservoir of auras, a visible resource  
An opening at last of living darkness,  
Perfect comprehension of non-being,  
Both radiant and void –

Mark Rothko

Is the maker of such color and such light,  
Of these ambiguous and illusory depths,  
    These visible enigmas – Mark Rothko

Not real Rothkos though, of course  
Just reproductions which will have to do  
And in the dim light they do well enough  
Taped on the ceiling,  
Floating high above my bed  
I lie here looking up and watch them fill  
With meaning, with intensity and palpable import  
And then resolve, recede

A throbbing visible at moments and then gone  
A confrontation, hieratic and subdued,  
Quietly imperious, although vague

A solitary dream of color, cloud-like darkness  
Luminous transcendence

The oracular illusion not negotiable in words

Thus, lying in the dim light here  
I have these presences above me  
My darkness opening on their enigmatic light  
Their subtly vibrant tympanums, shadowed space

Drowsing, almost asleep, I see them still

## IV

One night I dreamed I lay in darkness  
In a room much like this room, and over me,

Directly over me, were several doors  
Or openings – not open, yet not closed –

Wavering slightly, beckoning, yet black  
With concentrated blackness like a well,

Bespeaking depth and terror, totally  
Forbidding and yet dangerously there,

And leading where? The future or the past?  
Perhaps to neither – removed from any time,

Remote from any world or any life,  
Baffling comprehension, twisting thought

Which cannot pass that gate or needle's eye,  
Opening to the passageways of night

And corridors of rumor, secrecy –  
Things that are hidden, things far better hid,

The womb of time and its monstrosities,  
The elements of chance – elusive, small,

Like DNA combined and recombined,  
Spun out and measured, cut, and then re-spun,

These endless depths, darkness of manifold  
Dimensions and incomprehensible intent

I watched and waited, and then passed through the  
doors

Which one did I pass through? I couldn't tell

Yet choice was trivial now, irrelevant,  
Or improvised before the impending fact

It seemed that I had passed this way before  
Or had perhaps more probably in dreams

Of which this was the last significance  
Or rather say preliminary dreams

Had been precursors of this final one

The thing I dreamed next was an empty room  
All white, stark bare, and with one window – square,

And shaded by an off-white shade pulled down,  
The color of egg shells, just like the walls,

Yet with a polar tint – light blue; the room  
Though white was still three quarters dark

I sat directly opposite the window  
In a straight-backed wooden chair – I breathed, watched,

Watched longer, for the light to come to change  
The color in the shade's responsive space

Which breathed, dilated, altered depth and tone  
As it wavered while suspended in half-light

Yet measured glowing intervals a space  
Between it and the casement – an edge of light

Around it, openings through which the day  
Cracked in, or nearly so, upon the dimness

Light swelled beyond the shade, beyond that ply,  
And burned in that illusory thin space

The bluish tint was brightening to gray  
Suffused with lilac, glowing steadily,

Taking light from quick acetylene  
Flashes as the shade breathed out and in

I knew that light, a greater light, was there  
Although I couldn't see it clearly yet

But only by bright flares and inferences –  
All quick, tangential, mediated, false

How that faint square burned in my lidless gaze  
Though slightly swaying, drifting to dilate

Inward then receding to odd depth.  
I watched it from a greater distance now

The light was wavering, intense and strange  
And had a sharp high ringing sound – and cold –

Light ringing in the ear and not the eye  
This freezing light, this radiant terror

Then suddenly I knew this was a dream,  
For I was blind, my eyes gone white, burnt-out,

Two lumps of ice, dull white like hail stones  
And slowly melting down my face -- my eyes

So long had been deceived, my eyes had long been  
dead

There never had been light, nor luminous shade

Things had been otherwise

I had been staring into absolute  
Banality, a scribbled wall or less

An opaque surface, blank, a wall of dirt

I had been staring into sickness,  
Wretchedness, the nauseating taste  
Of a wasted existences, of time, our time  
Laid waste –  
The covert theatre of self  
A concentrated hatred and disgust concealed,  
Deferred revulsion there disguised as a career

And then I realized that I was bound  
As though I were held hostage, I was tied  
Down to the chair,  
And tightly twisted ropes, like pliers,  
Were fraying skin, cutting off the blood,  
Even as the blood was throbbing in my hands

A handkerchief was knotted in my mouth –  
A tight strangling fabric, I couldn't speak  
The monstrous thought  
Occurred to me that I would find  
Some cyphered message scribbled onto it  
If only I could rise and spit it out

I couldn't spit it out and couldn't stand  
Nor could I shout out loud, nor move at all  
My head hung down,

And every now and then the thought  
Passed through my mind of beckoning sunlight  
And of a luminous suspended shade

I woke and found myself alone  
And lying in the dark –  
What time was it? Near morning? Where was I?  
The luminous dial of my watch  
Said ten minutes after one: I'd slept  
Three hours though it felt like days

I peered down in the darkness at my watch face  
Glowing with its greenish light  
Like phosphorescence in the midnight sea  
It had no numbers, just small lines,  
Green dashes like a small sundial

My head was foggy, my eyes still blurred with sleep  
The black ambiguous space I stared into  
Held only one thing clearly visible,  
These notches of green light  
Which moved whenever I moved,  
Each one an hour of my life

It was a meter running  
Which I could not stop, yet what  
Was being meted out? Mere time  
Which can't be seen or touched, is mostly felt  
By tapping on the walls of memory  
The dial floated in the empty dark  
And yet was still obscurely part of me,  
Wrapped snugly around my pulse

My heart was pounding  
Again I thought what had awakened me?  
I stared into the dark but couldn't see

It was as if two hands  
Were held against my eyes  
I sat up straight and listened for the sound

So Panic whispered moving softly  
With his flute of bone,  
And Death which was a child beating on a drum  
They both came closer, stalking, watching me  
The small flute, tiny, deep inside my head  
The small drum beating louder in my ear  
They both were in the darkness, out of reach  
Among the shadows of the curtains,  
Moving around me, moving closer, darkness hidden  
in the dark

And then it lightened gradually  
And I could see a bit  
And saw the outline of the dresser and the chair  
My desk and then the black shape of the door  
Which gaped there like a cave or like a silent scream  
Somehow the door was open wide  
A space which led to further passages

I heard strange sounds that seemed to come  
From there, the flute had gotten louder now,  
The drum now more insistent

I felt  
The after-echo, the silver and seraphic overtones,  
Unearthly, series upon series,  
Infinite, precise,  
Cloudlike and radiant, and cold

And then blindness

Now everything was light, the room  
Was burning with strange light,  
Though still I couldn't see and all was dark

Since this was light that one could only hear

I felt a deep warmth, and then that I'd been called  
And heard my voice call back

And then I knew

Musical visionary, strange Catholic artist  
He'd come to seek from me the words, however vague,  
Approximate or compromised,  
The words he did not need in life  
Having his occult music of the birds

And so I recognized your presence – Messiaen  
The lingering vibration of your being,  
And which I called by name –  
Olivier Messiaen

He spoke first, having greater cause to speak:  
"The music you refer to was not all.  
Words may be weak, yet notes are also weak.

I was possessed by a rapture for the real.  
The world itself was music, which I heard  
And which became a sense of mystical

And overwhelming transport that I shared,  
Or tried to, by the music which I wrote.  
But soon I realized that no one cared.

They paid attention only to the note  
And totally ignored the spirit there,  
Which seemed to them eccentric and remote

From their concerns, but good enough for their  
Fine patronizing tolerance or scorn.  
This was the judgment that I had to bear.

Such judgments you have been at pains to learn  
In misdirected life, for in no word  
Of all you write could anyone discern

An innate joy, the holy gratitude  
Toward what has been created, toward what is,  
And the eternal presence of the Lord.

Yet to be angry with such foolishness  
Would be itself foolish. You are just part  
Of a world too venal and too restless

To understand the deeper truth of art,  
Crude, superficial and self-satisfied,  
Brutal and self-absorbed, and with no heart

To pity suffering, which it has multiplied,  
And with no mind for what cannot be sold  
And little for what cannot be applied

To its fine project of turning blood to gold,  
An impressive technical accomplishment.  
Thus the new world has surpassed the old.

And yet it isn't your enlightenment  
That is my main concern. The only thing  
That is required of you is the commitment

Of your literary skill. What I have sung  
In notes you must sing differently in words,  
As I have sung in praise, so you must sing.

I understood the music of the birds,  
Your medium is unpredictable.  
Yet every subtlety that it affords

Must be employed with concentrated skill  
Coherent with ardor and with intellectual love.  
You must create the more-than-beautiful.

Accomplish what will give artistic proof  
Of transcendental goodness, of divine  
Light visible, illumination from above.

Compose a work in which the whole design  
Bears witness to the Lord, and bears the risk  
That such a task requires in every line."

And I: "How could I undertake a task  
Beyond my powers and beneath my pride?  
Nor do I understand why you would ask.

All this is alien. Nor can I hide  
My disaffection and mistrust from you  
Who draws the curtain of the soul aside

To look within, or could if you wished to.  
Surely you know I cannot share your faith  
And am unwilling and unfit to do

What you have asked me to. It would be death  
For both the mind and creativity  
To imitate your own creative path."

And he: "One might expect some such reply.  
You are too proud. Yet it is not my concern  
To tell you all, nor even to tell why

This has been asked, and I will not return  
Repeating and explaining what I have said,  
Nor could I ever teach what you must learn.

But this much I can say: you have been dead  
To much in your own life. Experience  
Is like dark halls. We don't know where we're led.

And yet with something somewhat beyond sense  
We feel our way along the walls. Each crack,  
Although we can't say what it represents,

Is traced like Braille, questioned like the track  
Of not-completely-lucid memory  
Or probed and tapped and tested in that black

And mirroring void, the midnight sea  
And labyrinth of metamorphoses.  
Yet from these hairline cracks a mystery

Is seeping like fine dust, and it is these –  
Enigmas of the night and not the day –  
That you must ultimately sense and seize.

Yet how can this be done? Is there some way  
That one can grasp the rightness of the whole  
Merely by instinct and half-effortlessly?

On closer thought, it seems impossible.  
Yet still you might be guided by the thought  
Of letting effort educate the soul.

Thus, rather than evade the task I've brought,  
You must embrace it. Work will bring on faith.  
Only by action can you weaken doubt,

Though not destroy it. Only by this path  
Will you be able to avoid the hell  
Of frozen, constricted, spiritual death.

You must believe me, and consider well.  
For if you should refuse, or, what is worse,  
Consider this a dream – dismissible –

You'll end up bringing punishment, a curse,  
Upon yourself, for if you will not give  
Yourself this way, in dedicated verse,

You will be closeted and made to live  
Entirely within that self. And there  
You will not sleep but endlessly relive

Disgraces you've already seen before  
In previous and painful recollection  
And which you'll live once more and yet once more."

After he had said this, he was gone,  
And I was left there in the dark alone.

## V

For several nights I lay there  
Wondering and without sleep,  
My bloodshot lidless eye upon the dark,  
The dark above my bed, above my head

Where Rothko's light and resonant obscurity  
Was like a puzzle to me  
And a strange chastisement  
That I could not understand

Here comprehension drew a blank,  
Its grasp so weak  
That everything slipped out of it:  
Time, self, and thought, and my strange dream,  
Disquieting enigma and nightmare.  
What could I know?

And yet I knew one thing: the thought was in me  
Of my real failure,  
Of my pointless uninspired life.  
However it had come, the notion came  
And stayed with me, nor could I shake it off:  
The sense of having written trivialities,  
Of having lived an empty life,  
A trivial writer and a trivial man –  
This thought had taken hold of me – ineradicable,  
Relentless, impossible to dodge.  
The thought was working in me  
Like some ulcerous disease, a death  
Repeated endlessly, or like a sense of falling,  
The dreamer falling infinitely far  
Through darkness now unreal,  
And he himself now totally unreal  
But for the sickening and spinning feeling,  
An endless grieving for the thing now lost.  
Or sometimes it was like a screw  
Being twisted in my brain,  
A secret canker of the mind  
And that I knew would never end.

How much the thought recurred to me,  
Therefore, of needing to fulfill  
The strange request I'd dreamed, or had not dreamed.

I lay there in the dark night after night  
And could not sleep, and when I closed my eyes

The images of all past failures came  
Relentlessly and filled me with disgust.

I could not change. I could not get away  
From that which was my life, my very self,

The landscape of debris where my mind's eye  
Wandered without rest and searching

For a fragment of some truth about the world,  
For a fragment of my past – past time, dead time:

A barren landscape and yet a small, small one.

## VI

And in this context the significance  
Of what I'd dreamed or had not dreamed was vague,

Although oppressive and imperious.  
I could not see it, yet I felt it there,

Around me in the black space, over me,  
Within me – and now how strangely deep within:

For though it seemed a puzzle and a curse,  
I wanted it, it was a power as well,

A primitive power and a high constraint,  
An abstract and imponderable thing

And yet as close as my own body, my own mind,  
And their desire for nobility.

So in this way the claims of loyalty,  
Fidelity, invaded, took possession of my mind.

The mappings which my eye traced on the dark  
Were plotted around one darker central point

Which was a point of thought, a point of doubt,  
And one of muted honor finally.

The thought was of the unreality of life:  
All things were lighter than a mote of dust,

As insubstantial as a single breath.  
The night itself was merely a dark word,

A sound I could not hear but yet  
Could feel around me – cold, inanimate and void.

My doubt was of the truth of what I'd dreamed.  
Not that I gave it literal credence:

I had seen no pedagogical spirit,  
His visitation was a dream I'd had.

And yet what was the subject of this dream  
If not the nature of my life itself?

And if this was the subject of a dream,  
Life's import might be likewise found in dream,

For what is comprehended by a dream  
Except a thing analogous in its kind?

My life might be analogous to dreams,  
Therefore, or be a dream itself: import

Conceived and brought forth by some principle  
And motivation not of physical intent.

It is not merely meaning but import,  
For every meaning is a finite thing,

Yet import cannot help but move outward  
Like ripples on a pond, concentrically,

Its final circles infinitely far  
From their originating center point,

Like echoes echoing beyond earshot.  
I closed my eyes and searched with inner eye

And listened with the most attentive ear  
Yet could not find an echo of his speech

Or find the faintest traces of his steps  
Across the inner landscape of my mind.

The visitation of the night was gone  
From ear and eye before the violet light

And left there almost nothing of itself.  
And so I had this doubt about its truth:

There was no motivating deep significance  
In things beyond themselves, not in my dream

And not in anything. All things were blank  
And bare of any intimate or general intent.

And this included my perplexing dream –  
It was just nothing, empty images,

The inane rubbish that consumed my mind,  
My tireless self-invalidating curse –

To dream and dream and dream, both day and night,  
And hardly touch reality at all.

To dream and dream both day and night,  
This was my life, the substance of my life.

It was contemptible I knew, and yet  
The muted honor, furtive, a fine thread,

Strung through the beaded episodes of time,  
Was that I trust my dreams, and live them through,

And comprehend them, peering through their depths  
To glimpse some intricate or useable power.

I could not bother to concern myself  
With whether this power actually was there.

I had to simply suffer through the dream,  
Quieting my thought to let it take

The impress of it, however strange it might be,  
Creating complex counterpoints of words,

Words ordered by number, secrecy, and thought.

## VII

The dream had pressed illusion on my mind  
And everything was lightened by the breath

Of unreality, the world was now  
As weightless as blown dandelion seed

And yet a seed is fruitful, and the world,  
Likewise, is multiplied in later worlds

Displacing former ones, all here and now,  
Each thing a point where forces

Interlock like millstones, monumental,  
Grinding, absolute, and light as air

And weightless though it is, it is as real  
As you yourself are: a turning sea

Whose dissolution of past eyes and minds,  
Past bodies, fern fronds, granite, thistledown,

Creates anew new realms of mind, new flesh,  
New grinding stone -- all light as thistledown

Because created from a shadowy thing,  
Begotten by an absence on a lack,

The substitution of nonentities  
For others just now gone, though never there

Since they in their turn of such an origin  
Were shadows of a shadow precedent,

The waves and currents of a turning sea  
Which teeming though it is, is also void

The rolling shadows of the wind on wheat  
Are equal to the wheat, are part of it,

No less than evening's copper sun is part,  
Its ghost-like surf a man can walk right through,

Its weightless breakers foaming then cut low,  
Its heavy seed as bronze as pouring shot,

Its chaff as white and numerous as sand.

## VIII

Yet in the middle of the turning sea,  
As we negotiate its time and tide

Caught in its manifold evolving drift,  
Rapt in its currents, and yet circumspect,

Nearly detached at times – disturbingly –  
We seize on images that come to mind

Or which seize us: memory calls and haunts  
To beckon us beyond its images.

For certainly the image is not why  
The memory of times, of places, acts,

Remains and calls continually to us  
To reckon with its intimate vocation,

Covert, suspected in the nature of  
The thing, or in the nature of ourselves,

Or buried deeper still beyond that realm –  
Meaning beyond sense, imageless import

Beyond all figure, past all appearances  
From which it's drawn, a palpable idea

Which yet cannot be viewed by eye or mind,  
But is experienced blindly, wordlessly;

Prior to eros, prior to idea,  
To any figural glamour or transport,

And wearing mutely like the memory  
Of guilt, long after guilt is purposeless,

Or like an ambience, like the climate  
Of conscience famished for its human truth,

Or like the deepest fear beyond all fear,  
The primitive and substanceless haunting

Beyond all reason, without object, pure,  
An inner current of anxiety – your life

Like grains of sand, or like the whitest flour,  
Time falls and falls upon you, settles over you,

And settles on your face and on your hands  
and clothes.

## IX

So year by year you grow a bit more pale,  
More dusted over with time, more bleached and white;

Time is the ash that settles like the ash on coal  
And which, like it, conceals a deeper fire

Now too impaired, inhibited – and all  
By fear, fear of the world and fear of death.

And this fear keeps you running, continually  
Turning through the cycles of appearances.

When these appearances are lost to time,  
When you drop through them, and your memory,

Bereft of any image, now beholds  
The blank impalpable idea, the sacred void

Let the fear go, let the buried fire cool,  
And let the coal go dark behind your eyes

You must embrace this necessary dark  
Beyond all selfhood, prior to conception,

Beyond your many superimposed lives  
Yet though one does, appearances are there,

Both while one lives and in the way one lives

## X

Thus, in one's waking life appearances  
Are there, and we must move among them there

So we must go along, participating in  
This substitution of non-entities

But how long can you play the game,  
The chance-intoxicated game? All night?

Or less than that? Will you continue to?  
Must you not stop at some point finally?

For love and will are finite and become  
Desire for non-existence, for an end

To possibilities no longer new,  
Exhausted by themselves: an end to life,

The chance-intoxicated game – you wish  
Not to participate, to play no more.

And this must be desire not to will,  
To will the possibility of life withdrawn

And thus to will the world itself withdrawn,  
To will the option that one not exist

And will, therefore, the end,  
The non-existence of a world, one's own

This was one version of the meaning of my dream

## XI

And so I did not need to recollect  
The bright or dark particulars of what

I'd dreamed, of what I'd seen or heard. Indeed,  
They slipped my memory. I had no choice.

And yet the import and decaying sense  
Of what I must conjecture as my dream

Continued in my mind, something I felt  
Although I could not see it, nor yet could hear

Still it remained, a part of me, a force  
I could not locate or identify

Which I was moved in darkness to interpret  
And retell for you with these details,

Invented for their hoped-for resonance  
Of truth, though with no confidence of that

It was a dream I dreamed up, for the real dream  
And the substance of that dream are gone

I offer a contrivance of the truth

Like all words spoken in the dark,  
I know it must be error, travesty

Yet nonetheless I step forth into error  
To say what is both true and yet not true,

To feel the paradox of speech –  
Willing no longer to participate,  
Willing that I not exist  
And willing not to will,  
Willing the non-existence of one world

## **XII**

I watched the glassy sea that day,  
The sea of light and kindled fire.  
It didn't flow, it burned, that sea  
As bright as incandescent wire.

So bright, but where did it begin?  
A thousand waves like glaring chrome.  
I wondered how I'd ever come  
To comprehend its origin.

And where the dark Leviathan swims  
The sleeper moved its burning limbs,  
Its form a blur, its outline bright  
Amid the uncongenial light.

The fallen form of light amid  
That empty and reflected sun  
Turned as though dreaming on its bed,  
The bed of bestial creation.

A sleeping consciousness was there  
Amid the desert of the sea,  
The sea that spread out flat and bare  
And seemed to sparkle endlessly.

What could I do to call awake  
The light, the mind, the form that lay  
An outline in the burning lake  
And dreamed amid the burning sea?

I called and called; nothing arose,  
And when I knew that it would not  
The whole sea shrank before my eyes  
Into an insubstantial blot,

The erotic pool of origins  
Shrunk to a puddle, to a drop,  
A residue and what remains  
When time has dried the water up.

Then everything within that pool  
Was gone, like scratch marks in the dust,  
The processes of nature still  
And all their products gone at last.

And light was gone, or if there was  
Still light it only seemed to be  
One moment of an inner cause  
That was itself in fast decay.

Yet even though there was no light  
Without, and likewise none within,  
My mind was clear, I gained insight  
And knew disgust of such origin.

I wondered what it could have been  
That I had seen, or thought I saw,  
Within that blinding glare and when  
I unequivocally would know.

I stood in vertigo of thought –  
Obscure significance of light –  
And silently I raised a shout  
As though in protest or in hate.

Then, like an echo, day returned.  
The waves glared as they had before.  
The sun was high, a sea gull turned  
Against the breeze, boats made toward shore.

O vanity and monstrous cause  
Of all monstrosity, supreme  
Entangler of entangling laws,  
Source of defiling light, of time,  
Perplexed causality, and space,  
Where your obscenities take place,

Of earth itself, which bears the scars  
Of forces, of which you were first,  
Why did you dissipate your first  
Perfection in a million stars?

Why did you interrupt the peace  
Of nothingness, creating light  
Where there was neither time nor space  
Yet making nothing worthy of my sight?

It seemed another's voice had spoken through my  
own.

I couldn't understand my dream.  
I hated it. I hated what  
I dimly felt it stood for. I hated everything.  
Yet still I felt it as a motive or a call.  
In deference, therefore,  
I decided to comply with what was after all  
My own construction of the unrecallable –  
In deference, and yet still in my own way.

In deference, therefore, and  
In honor of the dream  
I would make now, on eight successive nights,  
A canticle.

## I

In darkness I at last lie down  
And shall be rid of all these works  
Which have been made, for dark  
Is darker still, the ice and snow  
Still deeper over the entire town.  
Therefore, the heavens and the earth are through  
And all the hosts of them,  
And so in darkness I at last lie down.

I hear the breeze blow through the night  
And murmuring stir the arbor's leaves,  
As the many fragrances of summer night  
Drift through the arbor, through its darkness,  
In its place of privacy.  
Shadows among shadows, the leaves  
Were ragged woven black shapes  
Fluttering in the occasional breeze.  
We lay together there, the two of us alone.

In the garden full of marigold and mint,  
Wisteria and dogwood  
And the plum tree waving in the night's warm breeze,  
Near the lattice full of honeysuckle,  
White and thick and lit with silver light,  
In the intricate shadows of the jasmine vines,  
In the quiet there of that dark place,  
The softly damp night air,  
Mysterious with scent on scent, perplexed me.  
How many perfumes of the garden  
Gathered there I never knew.

In the garden full of silence,  
I heard the trickling of the distant stream,  
The small brook followed by the moon  
Or following the moon  
Through all its long incalculable course.  
The pink moon and the orange moon  
Had scattered opal quavers in the midnight stream.  
The blue metallic dust of stars  
Was falling constantly  
Until the night was indigo and then completely black,  
Until it had not one small point of light,  
For all the stars were gone  
And everything was dark.  
The stream was black as oil, and the night,  
And both were flowing onward,  
Flowing infinitely far.  
I heard the sound of water which the stars had fallen in.  
The chalk moon burned like phosphorous  
And trembled like a fire in the stream.

In the garden full of silence,  
Full of jasmine and of roses,  
I heard the sound of water, fainter and then fainter still,

The sound of water following the hot white moon.

Even now the night still lingers in my thoughts.

The body of the world, palpable and known,  
Flows from a darkness and returns to it  
As I myself do likewise.  
But does it hold a particle of light?  
Can you believe that life  
Is something to be valued and thought good?  
The body the world, palpable an known,  
Flows from the dark stream and away from me.  
And I close my eyes.

## II

And when I close my eyes  
I see the fireflies drifting through the garden  
Where they sparkled once, leading  
The eye on deeper into darkness.  
Though now the garden disappears,  
And the eye led toward that deeper night  
Goes where?

What is the darkness that I stare into  
Now that every remnant of the night is gone?  
The darkness of the human eye itself,  
Its own inherent blank?  
In the cloister of my half-quiescent heart,  
I think of that lost garden, that dead summer night –  
The thousand scattered stars apparently so near,  
Black and ragged masses of the leaves against  
the deep blue sky,

The scent of grass and complex midnight chill.  
I wonder what it would have been in any case  
And wonder what it was.

And yet I know.  
It was a blank itself –  
A flaw inside the crystal of the void.  
And so the emptiness which is my heart,  
This retrospective quiet,  
Dreams for itself a fitting complement.

Who then has set man over all living things  
And given him dominion over all?  
This mistake, this monstrous thing  
Which cannot live,  
This clot of hatred and contemptible affection,  
This walking death.

And lying in the darkness in the night  
I slept and dreamed.

And in my dream I saw the tree  
Which I had seen before.  
Its branches arched high over me  
In dome on dome of bright translucent green and  
yellow-green

With fissures of white sun  
Breaking through the aqueous green shade,  
And saffron yellow flakes  
And emerald softer light -- the many layers  
Of complexly vaulted leaves.

The tree had its own life,  
A breathing swaying resilience, although sleeping,  
Active in each leaf and twig and branch.

It was a whole world in itself,  
An order which I could not comprehend.

So, curled within  
The tree's green opening, not half way up,  
Yet still far from the ground,  
I watched and listened,  
Waited, swayed  
With the movement of the breeze-blown trunk.  
Great waves of light and air  
Flowed through the tree  
And flowed through me.  
The tree's tall crests were like huge sails  
That rolled and rippled  
In the wind.

I swayed  
Upon that mast,  
The green and glittering sea below, and dew  
Flowed over me,  
And when I touched it to my lips  
I saw and heard what I had missed till then:  
A thousand birds were loose about,  
Were fluttering from branch to branch,  
Birdsong was clattering and trilling  
Like a thousand creaking gates.  
It was an arbor of green birds and birds of light.  
The green shade and the darker spots  
Were full of gold wings, yellow wings, and white,  
And had as many eyes.  
The leaves held eyes of all beasts of the earth;  
Their ears were listening,  
Leaves' shadows were their creeping forms –  
Passing into one another, passing out again.  
At moments, one would stand clear in the sun.

The leaves  
Held eyes of all beasts of the earth,  
All fowl of the air.

They all had eyes of agate, jade,  
Of copper or black ink.  
Each leaf had grass-green eyes or shadow eyes.  
I saw the eyes of cattle peering out,  
The eyes of panther, elk or muskrat,  
Of possum, weasel, deer,  
Green lizards and the red fox,  
The aphid on the leaf, the red ant and the black.  
The leaves were full of insects, frogs and creeping things.  
The branch became a serpent in my grasp,  
And fish would disappear in shadow  
From beneath my hand.  
The crinkled bark revealed a thousand forms.

I looked up  
And the sun was white and hot  
Above the tree and larger in the sky  
Than it had been.

And then the sun grew larger and then larger still  
Until everything was burnt  
And everything was gone  
And all was dark.

A scattering of ash lay in the dark.

### III

The moving waters of the sleeping world were no  
longer creased with movements of the creatures of  
the turning sea.

For that which was in any case still-born had settled  
finally and stopped.

Now only ash was left upon the waters which lay still  
and blank.

Now only ash was left upon the waters lying silently  
beneath the dark.

Now only ash was left to drift through darkness and the  
abyss of stars.

For now the stars were left there sparkling, scattering  
about, like puffs of sparkling ash that circulate  
and settle finally.

The mute dead sea was hanging like a crust of ash, it was a  
sea of dust, of sea of lead, a sea of stone.

The ash moved slightly, like a pile of cinders in the  
moonlight sifted by the wind.

Its skin was wrinkled inward by a movement – something  
hidden, struggling beneath, or sinking slowly  
down,

A wrinkle or a ripple on the surface like a scar denoting  
something previously there and now not there, a  
strangled or contested birth, a death.

For the world of waters and the multiplying seas no longer  
was, nor had it ever been.

The moving waters of the still-born world were no longer  
creased with movements of the creatures of the  
calm.

#### IV

The stars that marked the night  
Were scattered like a wake of phosphorescence  
In the parted seas,  
The parted seas that rushed together now.

Over multiplying seas of genesis  
Stars drifted once with their geometry  
And watched them, ordered them  
With mathematics, fables, grace and light.  
Yet now the seas of night  
Were coming to an end,  
The seas of genesis  
Were drying to some final form.

The stars were moving through the void of space,  
Were scattering like sparks, like flakes of cinders  
Glowing, sparkling and fluttering to dissolve  
Against the depthless black  
Or melting to the darkness of the sea  
No longer visible.

The two great lights of sun and moon  
No longer ruled the day nor ruled the night.  
Below, and it seemed infinitely far,

They were just areas of color and faint light  
Like two last embers of the fire  
When the room's completely dark.  
The moon was just a small white disk,  
The flashing of a coin,  
The sun a cauled and fulvid yellow  
Like the yellow of an egg yolk streaked with blood.  
For the sun was fissuring and breaking up,  
Cracking like a geode,  
Crumbling.

And gradually as I looked on  
The moon went dark -- it faded like a coal,  
And the sun went dusty like a larger coal.  
It flared once, then twice,  
And then it seemed to cool and crust with ash,  
To curdle like a blister drying up,  
Collapsing on itself.

The sea of night was filled with violence –  
A thousand waves that were not waves,  
A thousand winds that were not winds.

This was the lurching of a world gone out –  
The pitching of disintegrating space,  
The yawing of disoriented time,  
The nothingness of all  
Which now was rushing in upon itself,  
No longer parted by the central void  
Nor by the universal echo of that central silence.

There, poised above the ruins of the sun,  
I observed the holy chaos of the night.

## V

And far below I saw the earth adrift –  
A small white flower in the stream  
Which flowed more rapidly,  
With greater violence  
As though to flow beyond all ends,  
Though it was quickly coming to its end.  
The flower of the earth was crushed –  
It was a ruined thing, now breaking up,  
Dissolving in the glittering green seas.

The earth was breaking  
Like a thin ice-crust;  
The waters of the heavens turning,  
Shattering the wasted land.

For the orders of the heavens and the seas  
Were overturned.

## VI

Because the orders of the heavens  
And the seas were overturned  
The waters flowed back through the voided memory  
Of that initial place  
Which has no memory  
And which was dying like an echoed sound  
Just barely echoing.  
The waters that had once been parted  
Flowed together now,  
Like a furrow in the sand  
Effaced and smooth.  
The waters which had been above  
Rushed down to meet those below,  
And those below  
Were mingled with those above.

The cipher and its theatre of origins  
Was blanked,  
The infinitely ramifying chalk line  
Traced in gesture on the dark,

Meiosis of originating night –

These things were names eluding memory,  
Were empty sounds  
Were silences  
Were not.

## VII

Then finally there was just  
One small light  
Which separated darkness from itself.  
It was the smallest margin  
Separating void from void conceivable,  
Dividing one infinity of dark  
From every other one.

It was an insubstantial thing, this light,  
Was merely an illusion, pure semblance,  
And had its only being in darkness.

The area in which it was  
Was nothing in itself, was not.

The light was small, and delicate, and islanded in night.

Then, finally, it faded and went out.

## VIII

In the beginning there was nothing.

Only my voice.

In the beginning there was nothing.

Yet still I hear my voice.

Shadow of light  
Self-knowing voice  
Who could not answer?  
Since there is no light.

There is no warrant for hope.

Beauty not even  
Slightly manifest  
I have yet seen  
And I have heard.

There is no end to thought.

Who could not answer  
All I have seen  
What I have heard,  
Shadow of light?

This, on the eighth night, was my canticle.

## BOOK FOUR: SECOND WORLD

So drunk on the burdock hill I watch  
The morning's stars that drift and float  
Like metal filings past a swatch  
Of chicory that's near my throat

The bird's nest of dried Queen Anne's lace  
Shivers slightly with each gust  
Of early breeze, I raise my face  
And see the sun's hinge bright with rust

A coast of bare trees on the hill  
Is holding back the sun's match flare  
With dark kindling, cool morning air  
Is rainy and irresistible

My head pounds as I try to rise,  
I reach and see into the dim, my whole  
Head surges, spins and the trees whirl,  
Ditch mud like sleep has caked my eyes

The stars fade in the late spring sky,  
The ground tips as I try to stand  
I prop myself up with one hand,  
Time to get up, or at least try

## II

But grass as stiff as broom spines near  
My face is crackling so precisely,  
Unbending through my down-pressed ear,  
Unfolding to the ear and eye

The scent of dirt comes up to me  
And with it comes a sense of what  
I cannot hear and cannot see  
But feel around me without doubt

Earth crumbs offered without stint,  
Given, taken away again –  
Stems roots clods and the odd flint,  
Layer on layer leading on and on

I see the graves of loved and lover,  
Each non-existent cheek or lip  
Or empty socket staring up  
Through the rotted casket cover

I feel the breath they do not have,  
An odor of wet clay or mud  
Or moldy damp inside a cave,  
So strange, yet neither good or bad

Yet though still partly drunk I see  
More clearly than the others can  
The lies of dark shapes congregated there,  
Their greed and sharp hypocrisy  
And ludicrous self-satisfaction

How the exploited point them out  
Accusingly, and while they do  
Those exploiting continue to,  
Cloaked in their rationale of hate

I see some old men on the street  
Eating garbage, dressed in rags  
Or sleeping on a subway grate  
Their feet wrapped up in plastic bags

Then some old woman can't pay her rent  
And sits with her boxes on the curb –  
Soaked through with sleet, aimless arthritic bent,  
Lady and landlord in some far suburb

I see the poor man and his wife  
Turned out like Joseph from the inn –  
No health insurance and the rules are stiff,  
No hospital will take her in

I see the mentally disturbed  
Kept worse than animals in zoos,  
Squatting in urine, handcuffed to a bed  
Raped by attendants, drugged till they drool

I see the worker just let go –  
Reading standing at the factory gate  
Whose decision? Why? He'll never know  
The bosses decided to relocate

I see small children without food –  
Their stomachs swell and their attention shrinks  
They cry at first then grow subdued,  
Accepting their place in the scheme of things

Is this America? I thought  
This hell of poisoned water earth and air?  
This pile of garbage left to rot?  
This carnival of swindles? this stupid whore?

Is the lost America of love  
So truly lost now, never to be found?  
Except as parody – the country's end  
Much like a joke of which you've had enough?

The lost America of hope  
Of justice and integrity  
Gives way to mediocrity,  
Gangsterism, usury, and dope

How much longer will it be  
Before the books are burned? before  
The battering ram against the door?  
Before the final iniquity?

Hail American Fascists! Hail white  
Supremacist white trash bastards!  
The Reverend \_\_\_ and the Christian Right!  
Hail the New Covenant and its swords!

How much longer will it be  
Before the undream-like collapse  
Of the dream-inflated economy?  
Before the moonlight ladder snaps?

Go to Bedford Stuyvesant!  
Go to East Los Angeles!  
See the unforgivable want  
Hiding in the golden cities

I see the mobs of neo-nazi punks  
Smashing store front windows in,  
Beating up panhandlers and old drunks  
Setting a boy on fire with gasoline

Skin heads with pipes and baseball bats  
Looking for a foreigner to kill,  
Cruising side streets and parking lots  
Pick out an African and break his skull

Drug dealers with machetes and shot guns  
Do their business in the street,  
Right out among the cars, since they're the ones  
In charge and the cops cooperate

The slum apartment with no door,  
No heat, no working toilet  
An addict lying on the floor  
Half-conscious in her own vomit

What can be done to change all this?  
'Nothing,' I hear beneath the promises  
Nothing is what they really want to do  
Since they're content with things just as they are

Each within the "secret room" of self  
Huddled in terminal narcissism,  
Rapt in the auto-hypnotism  
Of the sovereign, consuming, liberated self

The citizens of freedom's land  
Avid for life-like images  
Whether they come from movies or the news  
Sit waiting for the show to start or end

The unborn-living living-dead  
Eat, shit, watch TV, and die  
They never learn. What can be said  
Of a truly base frivolity?

### III

No money left I go downtown  
To see what I can find,  
Looking in the street  
For a bite to eat

At the corner of Temple and Market  
In Hartford, Connecticut  
I see the end of one particular empire  
As they throw the trash into the fire

Why is there so much traffic?  
-- Everyone's entirely at home  
Silently the buildings crack  
And teeter in the April wind

So many people in the street,  
Nothing left to do or say  
There will come a time, a day,  
Looking for a bite to eat

### IV

There was an old woman  
Who lived in a shoe,  
Who lived in a cardboard box  
On the street  
She didn't have heating  
Or a toilet or a shower,  
She ate from the dumpster  
Whenever she ate

Then three clever men  
Who lived in a box,  
Who lived in a much bigger  
Five sided box  
With papers and papers  
And guards and many locks

Came asking for money  
They wanted her money  
They needed her money  
For their friends overseas,  
For missiles and bombers  
The Israeli defense force  
And various and sundry  
Liberation armies

And they needed her box  
And they needed the street  
Including the dumpster  
And the garbage she ate

## V

Another night I had a dream I'd had before –  
much briefer than the one I've just recorded,  
this: a sudden pounding, then confusing shouts  
a man with a battering ram broke down the door,  
blindfolded, handcuffed, barefoot I was led out

The Special Security Police  
had come to see if I would like to talk  
My hands were bound together with a piece  
of nylon cord behind my back

My ankles tied against the chair's  
front legs, and then another cord  
was noosed around my neck and tied  
to the chair's back, there were three other chairs

There was a blinding klieg light,  
electric prods and some kind of baton,  
cigarette lighters, and once a cigarette  
and at one point a bucket of urine

There was a blindfold, and a long straight pin  
a dentist's drill, pliers and hacksaw  
a physician at one point came in --  
all strictly in accordance with the law

For see! The state of nature has returned!  
Our oil tankers have returned!  
Although the temple's floor has cracked  
The managers consult the zodiac

The wars of liberation have been won!  
Freedom from the barrel of a gun!  
Freedom for Aramco and Exxon!  
From henceforth let all nations learn  
That bank accounts can freeze and napalm burn

O heroes of the state police  
Preserving us from terroristic menace  
From dangerous drugs and from all violence  
Guard our rights at home and abroad

O heroes of the CIA  
The NSA, the FBI  
Protect us from both criminal and spy  
Guard our rights at home and abroad

You soldiers in the wars of ideology  
Aid us in the governance of thought  
Preserve us from corruption of the mind  
Guard our rights at home and abroad

## VI

One day while I was passing through downtown  
People had gathered on the Court Street bridge;  
Talking and shuffling, most were looking down  
Into the channel where cops paced the ledge.

I weaved my way in closer through the crowd,  
And then I saw -- a suicide, what fun!  
The others said this too, though not out loud,  
They stood around assessing the occasion.

One cop swam out and grabbed him by the hair,  
Another popped up underneath his arm.  
He was himself quite passive, simply there,  
His jacket billowing out as though in a storm.

Though not drowned or distended yet he looked  
As light and buoyant as a cumbersome  
Air mattress, or perhaps those mannequins stocked  
As novelty amusements for the lonesome.

What a resistant load he proved to be!  
Then he was grappled tight; hand over hand  
They hauled him up as limp as wet laundry  
And heavy, evidently, as a bag of sand.

I happened to glance down and saw his shoes  
Which he had left behind, right by my feet:  
Black leather gleaming bright. Meanwhile, the street  
Was filling with people and The News.

They tried to interview his sobbing wife  
Or girlfriend, since she happened to be there:  
Had she any idea why? Just something brief.  
They'd really like to get it on the air.

They packed him in the ambulance to go.  
They thought he'd live, although nothing was spoken.  
They thought "He's still alive, maybe...." But no,  
He died that evening, for his neck was broken.

One boring night a nagging impulse takes  
Me to the bridge to watch the current there.  
The Holiday Inn's bright cursive sign makes  
A scrawl of neon green across black water.

## VII

At a crack in time I heard:  
"The spirits say there are two worlds  
And twilight is the gap between,  
When light and darkness intermingle  
Allowing both realms to be seen,  
The world of darkness, and of light;  
The dark world that we see by day  
Shows faded in the partial night,  
The world of light we almost see  
Is darkened nearly visible, yet cannot stay."

But at crack in time I watched  
The darkened daylight fall,  
The streaming sun coagulate  
Into a burning ball,  
Spreading darkness before the west  
And a radiant bright remnant,  
And total darkness in the east.  
The star-filled, black and open night  
Shone all around, and high  
Above the autumn moon was bright.

At a crack in time I heard  
The wind whine in the eaves,  
The city streets were littered then  
With fallen forms like fallen leaves  
Which, though they looked like fallen leaves,  
Like rotting leaves, were really men.  
And every dark leaf had an eye,  
The street was choked with dead leaf-eyes,  
And all around for far and wide  
The night was full of whispered lies.

And at a crack in time I heard:  
"The written law is rhymed in lead  
The powers of the realms of gold  
Determine what is seen and said,  
Cover your ears and close your eyes  
Of all your choices, make this choice.  
An inner light will make you wise,  
A quiet word will let you be,  
A mystic word will set you free..."  
Then black wind drowned the tiny voice.

Then someone breathed upon the glass  
Who is it? What's outside?  
--Breath of the clamorous numerous dead

Moving and moving through the night...  
So many cries and screams and calls  
Echo through our sleep, that's also theirs.

Through millet grains we swim, despair  
Of grasping what we yet do – the door of doors.

Open it – and now what do you find?  
The incoming tide, blood burning through  
Walls, a floor that's a window too,  
A sea of windows gone dark in the mind  
Yes, someone has breathed upon the glass,  
Who is it? What's outside?  
Breath of the silent yet numerous dead,  
The tortured and the maimed

So many cries and screams and calls  
Echo through our sleep  
And will not stop.

And at a crack in time I heard:  
"Who listens at a crack in time?  
A roach inside eternity? –  
Scavenging for residues of words,  
Hear-say and syllable, rhythm, rhyme,  
Crumbs of the overwhelming Word –  
Not able to rise up and see  
The vision as it must have been  
Before the advent of such trivial men  
And arrogant remorseless women."

## VIII

Inside the voices that I heard  
There was a dream, a dream  
They brought me with their word,  
I followed through its opening page

I followed and I followed longer,  
The voices grew into a place  
They whispered on and always stronger –  
Many places yet one place

Then riding I was riding,  
Riding in the desert  
A blue and cobalt desert  
Between the sea and mountains

Between the sea of ebony  
And mountains of gold and copper  
Between the sea of ice  
And the mountains of green fire

The sand hills flushed to red  
The day was opening its jaws  
The sun was a huge spider  
And dew was glistening on shrubs

Bright tracteries of dew,  
The spider webs of the sun –  
Sand valleys and sand hills  
Were fired pink and red

The sun was a white furnace  
Flung open at the horizon,  
I felt the open furnace door  
Beyond the icy hills

The desert sand was amber  
Like the smooth pelt of a tiger,  
And the tiger of the sand  
Was striped with crooked shadows

The shadows on its ribs  
Were black and went one way  
They said, 'go back go back'  
Pointing back where I came from

A steady horse beneath me  
I was going toward the sun,  
I was waiting for the desert  
To unfold itself and it did

How I love you green O green  
Green branches in the wind,  
The desert flowed away at last  
The amber crust of sand

My love is green, she's green as grass  
Green with her upraised arms  
Her huge and very bright green eyes,  
Searching for my hidden love  
I came into the river country

The sun was low behind the trees,  
That its blood spattered through –  
On the black earth it was dying,  
Profuse and silent agony

For forty nights I waited there  
To go on further through  
The deep green wood the sun had made,  
My eyes were two white suns

My amber eyes like a tiger's eyes,  
My hay green and hay yellow eyes –  
These were like my lovers eyes,  
Watching waiting for her call

I waited by the river's edge  
As it flowed strongly on,  
It called for me to enter  
And it called for me to come

The trees had eyes their bark  
Had faces as I passed beneath,  
Their branches were like arms  
That lifted high black streaming hair

My horse could feel the breathing  
Of the woods around so close,  
And near the river's mist the air  
Was like a woman's breath

Steps and steps of horses,  
Horse of shadows shadow horses  
Flowed amid the waving trees  
Hanging moonlit in the stream

The sun gone down the sky was huge  
Deep black the stars were falling sparks,  
The circle of the shining moon  
Burned in the water like gold

With horse and shadow-horse I went,  
We swam into the moon's circle –  
We broke it with a shimmering wedge,  
It glittered back where we had passed

The river's water raked and pulled  
It sucked us in it drew  
Us in so steadily,  
The current the dark undertow

I felt that time had stopped,  
We didn't seem to move –  
The night was damp and very cold  
And my horse's breath was frost

The bank came near and there  
I met the Indian the morning sun  
Burned in the tree's inverted crotch –  
He stood there tall in streaming light

He stood up in the bright oak tree  
In the crotch of a tall oak,  
Then he was at my side  
He raised his hand his eyes were green

His teeth were yellow like dried corn,  
He smiled and smiled for me to smile  
I looked around – my horse was gone,  
Gone with the shadows of the night

We walked all day and then at night  
We camped – he made a fire,  
I hadn't realized how cold it was  
But my hands and face were numb

The fire was hot my skin got warm,  
Beyond the green and yellow flames  
I saw his face observing mine,  
It floated in the fire's streaming  
Like the moon in the water's streams

It flickered and floated in the fire,  
It floated down to the fire's sticks  
And then blew out a cloud of sparks,  
It floated around and floated up

It floated up to the fire's crown –  
Then suddenly it was the sun –  
The night had gone, the day had come,  
He and the fire both were gone

I walked on through the tall tall trees,  
Through domes of leaves and leafy crowns  
The sun placed fingers on my skin  
Like a buyer fingering some cloth

And then there was a field of ash  
Long houses once the Iroquois  
Were burned and everything was burned,  
The houses of the Iroquois

Their land was burned just ash  
Was left and nothing left but ash,  
The smell of burnt skin burning wood  
Charred white ashes smoking still  
A strange smoke drifting everywhere

A woman sat upon the ground  
Weeping for her murdered child  
Weeping with her long black hair  
Her long and black her jet black hair

Her hair fell down before her breast  
And at her breast her child  
Was staring up with open eyes  
As black as buttons and as dead

Its head fell back as limp  
As any rag doll's head,  
My shadow in the sun  
Passed silently over both of them

Bodies and parts of bodies  
Were thrown everywhere,  
Legs torn off and arms ripped loose –  
Torsos without arms or legs  
Heads with no faces charred faces

Charred faces with no eyes or nose,  
Intestines blue and bluish green  
Like rotted sausage casings  
Spilled from the stomach of a woman  
Who lay with both her arms tossed wide

Her naked child still clung  
To one half-severed leg,  
It squirmed and fussed and cried aloud,  
Its mother could not hear

A corpse was rotting in the road,  
It had ballooned to twice its size –  
Its legs were such a greenish grey  
And its face was black as tar

Then near a ditch I saw a man  
Who slowly pulled himself along  
Crawling forward on his palms,  
Both legs were torn off

Blood came in a pulsing gargle  
From his nose and from his mouth,  
He seemed to be screaming screaming  
But all was choked and drowned with blood

One leg was ripped off at the thigh  
A little above the knee,  
The other was ripped loose from the hip  
With part of the buttock too

He made a trail of thick blood  
Blood from both legs stumps  
And blood came from his anus too,  
He seemed to be shitting gouts of blood

I came out on the other side,  
The wood birds chattered overhead  
With sounds like a million creaking gates  
Or like the whistlings of the mad

A dog came from behind a tree  
It foamed a moment then it leaped  
As though a wave had crested, broke  
And then washed over me

The back-wash was my blood  
Such deep red blood green blood,  
Blood spread and spurted from my arm,  
Its jaws were like steel jaws

And then my knife was deep inside  
Its stomach, yet it still bore down  
I buried my knife – again again  
Deeper and harder every time

The dog fell like a burlap sack,  
Empty and limp – its face became  
A woman's face, its shagged fur  
Her thick black hair her bloody hair

And then her soft inviting face  
Became a wooden skull,  
A thousand bees were swarming there  
As though inside a tree

Bees are the kisses of the sun –  
They swarmed around me and the sun  
Was laughing – all the shrill birdsong  
Joined with the laughter of the sun

Loud laughter in the sun's green trees  
A thousand thousand bees stung me –  
Bees are the kisses of the sun,  
I ran as I had never run

Then it was night, they fell away,  
A sickness came through the forest's depths,  
Whispering for me and whispering  
Like a thousand women whispering

'Horseman horseman horseman here'  
They said so loud so quietly  
'Horseman horseman horseman hear  
Everything we've come to say'

I vomited the night was red  
The night was black the grass  
Was cold against my face,  
My body shivered with cold sweat

I dreamed and dreamed I heard  
The movements of the grass,  
The grasses kissed and tongued my ear  
Saying their tiny secrets there

I heard the insects in their world,  
The ants were stirring in the dark,  
Their catacombs where spirits lie  
Long nights and years to walk again

The trees were gathered all around,  
The night was opening its wounds –  
Archaic song, a deep black song  
With chanting in the moonlit leaves

Then three old women curious  
First one, then two, then three  
Came close and bent to look at me,  
Then silently they went away

They went away into the night,  
I saw them stopping here and there,  
Stopping and bending then moving on,  
Picking up gleanings from a field  
That yet was nearly bare

And deeper in the night I saw  
A large campfire – four old men  
Were sitting around it playing cards,  
Talking drinking out of gourds

Their shirts were black and braided gold  
Hung round their wrinkled necks  
That shook like turkey wattles  
When they laughed, their eyes were gold

They played cards laughing quietly  
And looking closely I could see  
Their cards had human limbs on them  
Their gourds were full of human blood

Their gourds were full of blood and pus  
They laughed and wiped it from their mouths,  
Their arms and wrists were dried cornstalks  
Their hands were roots still caked with dirt

Their hair was yellow hair  
And the light brown of the cornstalk's hair,  
It hung down in their faces, faces  
Brown and cracking like cracked dirt

And then I woke, the morning dew  
Shined in the grass and spiders' webs  
In every tree turned it and light  
To thin ice crystals in the leaves

I walked on in the brightening green  
The orange sun and the yellow sun  
Sparked through the leaves its beams  
Were full of radiant and spinning dust

And then I saw I spied him  
There at the clearing's edge  
He wore a black hood over his head  
The rest of him was dressed in red

Then in an eye blink he was near  
Our knives were drawn  
They scraped and flashed  
Like bright wings in the morning air

My arm was dead the cloth  
Was stiff and still blood-soaked,  
It was my left arm only though,  
My right arm was still good

I stabbed him in the heart  
And in his heart I dug my blade,  
He fell without a word or sound –  
A fear came over me just then,  
I listened and I looked around

He lay there dead upon the ground  
And blood as red as red lacquer  
Was on the bright green stalks of grass  
In tiny beads and clotted smears

I don't know why I had to see,  
I don't know why, and yet I drew  
The black hood from his head  
And saw the man's face I had killed

He smiled at me a funny smile  
Was on his lips his lips  
Were like a woman's lips,  
He smiled up with a woman's face

Then neither a man nor woman smiled  
Neither a woman nor a man –  
Its pelvis jerked and jerked  
As though pulled up and up by strings

But only that one part of it  
Was pulled by strings was pulled  
By strings was something dead  
Was like a puppet pulled by strings

And then it was a child's face  
That smiled there so angelically,  
Smiled in the deep repose  
Of death as sweet as any sleep

Quickly its skin turned leather-like  
Dried and tough and stiff and brown  
As though it all were shrinking up,  
It grinned and showed its teeth  
Like parched corn, purple and tobacco brown

I went on further the night came,  
The trees were black shapes in the night,  
The trees had gathered skeins of stars  
To wrap their heads in sparkling nets

Morning bled out through the skies  
The morning tree the mantis tree –  
Each oak tree was a mantis tree,  
The mantis stirred and looked at me  
With bright green eyes, hay yellow eyes

Each oak tree was a mantis too  
And every mantis clutched a man  
Who hung the way that hanged men do,  
Their chin tucked low and neck askew

Each mantis held a single man,  
Their poses were like playing cards  
Or monarch wings of stained glass windows  
With yet a green light shining through

The rain the rain, then came the rain –  
A hot rain burned and sizzled,  
Through the leaves it simmered –  
Burning whisper of corrosive rains

I lay there, on the ground I lay,  
The brilliant rain and golden rain  
Corrosive whispers of the rain  
Were seeping seeping into me

I weakened on the ground  
And I could feel my hands  
Growing thin and growing frail  
Like metal that's becoming rust

My limbs were blood-caked  
Bandages I touched my mouth  
My mouth was numb and  
Stiffened as though packed in gauze

The rain will stop, the night will come,  
But in the dawn I too will be  
Together with my mantis lover  
Dead inside the mantis tree

Then I'll be alone with her –  
Green O green, I love you green  
Green branches in the wind,  
The desert flowed away at last

And then I'll be alone with her,  
The frozen mountains and the fires  
Of the desert sun will all be gone  
And I will be with her alone

Riding, and I was riding  
My horse so full of powers  
The powers of thought and movement,  
The powers of will and fear

The powers of all torments  
And all powers of desire  
Between the sea of copper  
And the mountains of green fire

## IX

When I awoke I felt around  
Me in the dark of my weed-bed,  
I had to be quite sure I wasn't bound  
Helpless there or even dead

I lay there in the weedy ditch,  
The beauty of the morning shone  
Through ghastly after-images –  
I rose and was myself again

A knotty twisted apple tree,  
The morning full of singing birds –  
Listening, knowing, I could feel, see,  
And then speak clearly with true words

I love the glassy dews that shine  
Catching the morning sun's first light,  
The chill grass scent, the air like a crisp wine,  
My inspiration and delight

I love the brown grass, the crown vetch,  
The slope of steep hill down to the road,  
The stony cut where night rain flowed  
To end up in its roadside ditch

The broach-like cage of Queen Anne's lace  
Now brown and stiff, sere chicory –  
All these are beautiful no less  
Than wind and cloud and speak to me

The stands of trees along the hill,  
The maple woods, the shadows, damp  
Air in the early light, the still  
Expectant silence, the stone well

The pine woods where the needles fall,  
Thickly covering the ground,  
The quill-like matting soft to the footfall,  
The pine cone dropping with a skittering sound

The yellow leaves of maples, oaks  
That cover traces of an old stone wall,  
A rusted iron gate that creaks  
When you pass through it to the well

The light that burns the topmost bars  
Of fir tree windows, dusty light-smoke,  
Mote-filled beams of light, the hermit's  
Cell of silence in the noon-dark firs

I love the old dried milkweed pods –  
A curled-in slit, yet still faint down  
From when their white silk threads were blown  
From fields to empty fields and woods

The poplar tree with gold leaves wet  
With morning rain, wind-rustled-through,  
Bright drops of water fall from it  
Onto my face as I look up through

The spreading limbs of large-boled trees,  
The oak and maple and copper beech –  
Sun-heavy boughs, dark roots that reach  
Downward into depths of earth

Rain through the leaves and tree trunks when  
They're damp and glistening and wet –  
How absolutely clean and sweet  
The air smells after evening rain

How absolutely clean and sweet  
The air smells when the morning dew  
Is thick enough to soak my old shoes through,  
My pant cuffs too, and wet my feet

But then it dries as day comes on  
And morning's clarity gives way  
To the chill warmth of an autumn day,  
Rich sunlight of October sun

It heats the browning meadow still –  
You hear a special silence there,  
No cabbage whites flit through the air  
And the hum is scarcely audible

Empty sunlight, silence, near sleep –  
The apple orchard smells so ripe,  
Yellow jackets hover around  
Mashed windfalls fermenting on the ground

The sunlight deepens, bars lengthen with  
The afternoon, there is a loneliness  
In the empty yard, the brown dirt path –  
A screen door's clap disturbs the silence

An electric saw, someone hammering far off,  
There is a difference in the barn lot as the sun  
Shifts down -- late afternoon,  
In slanted light a grey horse drinking at a trough

The light is gold, a halo on brown dirt,  
The steeper rays catch motes from the cut grass,  
The tree line darkens to a silhouette,  
The farmer on the tractor shields his eyes

Dusk-amber light, sunset flattens low  
Beyond the field and past the wood-lot hill  
Where in a ragged line tree outlines go  
From dun to black, then can't be seen at all

Slowly the evening turns to night,  
The farmer and his cattle meet  
To move at last in common peace  
Around the one abiding place

I go with them, there all must move  
Together, husband, wife, daughter, son  
Amid the deep and hidden grove,  
The starry well of dark creation

The star-filled well where moonlight gleams  
Ripple the dark water-void,  
Where emptiness's radiant streams  
Brim full the crying eye of night

I have two selves, two spirits, minds –  
One loves the darkness and the night,  
The other loves the day and light,  
Both entered there where day descends

Then sobered in the common sleep,  
I touched the unacknowledged springs  
And felt the life of earth-born things  
Building there as the world took shape

## X

What can hold back the rising tide?  
And what will dam the seas of hate?  
Can nothing do it? Is it too late  
To wake a distracted multitude?

Where can the remedy be found?  
Yet only the shaping mind will bring  
Forth oracles of the sleeping spring  
Of insight from its human ground

Imagination, charity, and hope  
Will rectify the unjust law –  
Vision must see and say to draw  
Straight boundaries toward their human shape

I came this morning from the sun –  
Against the sun I stood, and stand;  
Grains of the burning beach run from my hand,  
I will remain when all is done

## FIVE SEASONS

### Accords

You find me digging here, my hands in dirt.  
What business do I have? To plant this seed,  
Relinquished to the processes of earth –  
My hand comes to the soil now opening....

So that the changing seed, with rain and sun,  
And planted in the darkness of the soil,  
Dream through its verdant germination there  
And break the surface with its leaf and flower.

What purpose do I have? I take the seed  
And cover it with handfuls of black soil,  
This blackest dirt, the covenant of earth.

For earth with rotted leaves has made that  
Which calls forth from the seed its latent life  
And calls forth latent powers from the hand.

## **After Summer Rain**

And after rain – wet soil, the wet dirt  
As black as coffee grounds and with a mist  
Of rain still in the air and drops of rain  
From every leaf that drip down on the ground.

This is the damp disclosure of the earth,  
The soil soft with showers of early June  
And heavy mist that soaks into the ground  
And settles to the deepest part of things.

Here at the center of the garden plot  
I smell the sweet pervading scent  
Of green mint, of basil, and the fragrant soil.

And at this early hour as the mist  
Disperses slowly with the sun, I see  
In front of me the ordinary renewal of the earth.

## **Along the Surface**

Enigma of ripeness: now the earth itself  
Discloses, wonderfully, a second skin,  
Residual life so thinly scattered, here  
And there, along the surface of the world.

The leaves have fallen and the trees are bare,  
The corn and barley shorn from the fields.  
At evening, all the voices of the sun  
Are gathered in a cone whose apex lies

So far beyond the earth's burnt, jagged edge  
That only rustling echoes are left here,  
And cold, stiff grass, and night's new silences.

The dirt is black but dry. And when I turn,  
I see my footprints wrinkling the earth,  
Whose deeper life is still not yet disclosed.

## Anima

The substance of the earth is life itself  
Dissolved in streams and trafficked into roots,  
Conducted through the fibers of the trees  
To circulate in branch and stem and leaf,

To act and mingle in the light and air,  
Once more returned to that ancestral realm,  
To powers of powers and the principle  
Of time burning and yet actively at rest.

Then it is fallen to the ground in leaves,  
In branches broken by wild autumn storms.  
Foxfire, rotting, it is with all these.

And rain comes taking everything back down  
Through complex earth, the infinite networks,  
And life returns into itself again.

## **Another Afternoon**

The sun is bright, and dusty, through the leaves.  
Along their edge the edge of sunlight burns,  
Corroding them against the glare of day;  
Cracked charcoal shadows vein a pewter sand.

I sit beneath, watching the afternoon:  
The air is still but for the slightest breeze  
That sifts among the field's tall dry grass  
And just confirms the stillness and the heat.

What do I feel now as I sit beneath  
The crooked punished tree, the shaded sun?  
A warmth, the memory of light on skin,

Something conferred and, for all that, denied.  
And deep in the bluest distance of the sky  
No hint of rain, no break for the long drought.

## April Night

Disquiet of April. New grass fills the night  
With scent of damp earth and of chill spring life.  
A scent so deep and subtly disturbing  
A stream of days comes flooding back to me.

Ancient and new roots now stir together  
In the archaic life of memory;  
The burning bush of time once burnt to ash  
Now reaches upward, branching through the night.

I walk among the windy tree-top stars –  
The cold clear sky! – going not on a street  
But on the surface of the darkened earth.

Here who has known me? Seen me? Heard my voice?  
Earth cold and silent, visited, unknown,  
Opening before me, closing up behind.

## Approach

I dreamed in the plum tree's shade that afternoon  
And looked up through the branches where the sun  
Was glaring, winking, through the chinks of leaves.  
The day was warm and quiet – just faint breeze.

And after I had watched a while – the light  
A kind of apparition in the leaves –  
I turned and stretched myself out on the grass  
And closed my eyes, just being, listening....

It was as though I felt a rising wave  
Falling and rising, breathing, like a swell  
In the sea's calm, and I floated, adrift,

And in the fluid drowse of the afternoon  
Went deeper than the groundswell's systole  
To touch its darkest, somnolent, still center.

### **Another Invocation**

O you about the moving branches and  
Part of that resonant and shifting light  
Amid the dark green laurel-colored leaves  
Of plum, moving and turning in the light,

Moving and turning in my thought, almost  
A thought yourself, I sit here in the shade  
And play with the enigma of that light  
And of your brief and yet persuasive beauty.

The branches hang above me and just move  
In breeze that sways them slightly as I watch,  
The shadows move upon me in my thought.

With figures of the leaves across my face  
I turn to you. Desire is just thought,  
And I concede it to the moment past.

## Approach

I lay in the plum tree's shade that afternoon,  
Looking up through the branches where the sun  
Shone down, filtering through cracks of leaves.  
The day was warm and quiet, just faint breeze.

And after I had watched a while, the light  
A glistening white oil through black paper,  
I turned and stretched myself out on the grass  
And closed my eyes, just being, listening....

It was as though I felt a rising wave  
Falling and rising, breathing, like a swell  
In the sea's calm; I floated there, adrift,

And in the waiting silence of the afternoon  
Went deeper than the groundswell's systole  
To touch its darkest, somnolent, still center.

## August

You ask me where I'm off to – just right here,  
Just down the path I took you through before  
When summer made the pea vines hum with bees  
And the flowers of the beans burned in the sun.

You might say, different time so different place,  
For one can't ever see the same spot twice,  
Touch the same leaf or stem, the flower's scent,  
Though just one hour pass, isn't the same.

You might say, but you won't. You'll come along  
Instead and be content with just pretense,  
Smiling and pleased to pick that one pea blossom,

Thinking so many things. And there's so much.  
How well the garden does. Although this week  
Has been a little hot and somewhat dry.

## Beauty and Sadness

October and the burning leaves  
Flutter and flake down from the sunlit tree.  
October sunlight, the radiant bright crown,  
The aura and gold of life that is mere light.

Light has grown softer, yet it is richer too.  
Who could describe the autumn? Still and blue,  
Bearing a light so desolate and pure  
And twinkling on the surface of the pond.

Beauty and sadness touch each falling leaf;  
The pond is filled with yellow leaves and gold,  
Rose madder leaves and dark rust-eaten leaves

Mystery of ripeness and enigma  
Of the silent noon are bared and opening  
And lead beyond the surface of the earth.

## Beyond

Blue evening light: low hummocks of raked leaves  
Mark off the orchards, yards, and garden plots  
Like ancient burial mounds, like serpent rows  
Of hills, like bodies covered up in leaves.

The slowly turning funnels of grey smoke,  
Leaking and streaming from the mounds and banks  
Of burning grass, begrime the chilly air,  
Their sweet and acrid smell like frankincense.

Our evening footsteps lead us toward the hill  
Where sunlight bleeds beyond the brambly trees,  
A burning dwindling presence past the wall

Of dark trees and of burning fallen leaves.  
The sun's face must be hidden in the earth,  
Yet leaf on leaf, like pages, covers it.

## **After Bonnard**

Her form amid the radiant penumbra –  
Gold water and gold tiles and gold light.  
Time is the faintest whisper in her mind,  
Less than the sound of water, each small splash.

Rather it's something known by its absence,  
And so not even thought, obscurely known.  
Time is not permeating warmth of water felt  
Through every part of her and trace of self

Dissolving in the bath of golden light,  
Time is what isn't present, what's not felt,  
Archaic syllable of no import

In this basilica where life is light,  
Where flesh is clarity, and being poised  
Upon a moment time cannot dissolve.

## Breath

The morning's rain still drips from every leaf,  
Still clings in water beads on every stem,  
And in each vine, within each flower's cup,  
A few bright drops are beaded at the tip.

A drizzly mist of rain is in the air.  
It settles slowly, condensing on each leaf  
And makes each leaf and vine more deeply wet,  
Weighted with drops of wet and bent downward.

How everything is dampened in the mist  
Condensing round the outline of each leaf,  
Each blade of grass, to make it glisten wet.

How much can come from this, this early hour  
Of rainy mist suspended in the air  
And bringing forth the garden's earliest life?

## Cathedral

Unheard-of silences are echoing  
Through evening's cold air toward the cobalt sky.  
Higher and higher, silence gathers us  
Into the opening realm of failing light.

My feet just touch the black dirt where I stand.  
The path is lost amid the trees that hold  
The blue of ebb-light, and the yellow-green  
Of sunset, past their black and tangled boughs.

Sometimes I need to touch the earth, although  
I never can, I hover over it.  
Sometimes I need to touch the tree's rough bark.

The wood is gathering itself around  
The traces of my steps. My shadow, too,  
Is lost, my voice falls silent in the air.

## Coverings

The eye is opening, the eye a wound,  
The open wound ripped wider by the day,  
The burning syllables of light that speak  
Their word – a dagger in the open flesh

Of which the mask that cauls the face is made,  
Chaos the word of morning uttered now,  
This outcry of the light upon the wall,  
This kindling of images, desire.

The garden sifts and searches through itself  
As wind moves lightly over it; the leaves  
Are tongues about to speak, the stems are dry.

The soil is the merest film of earth.  
We hold to it, yet we are like the leaves  
That, dried and curled, now scratch along the street.

## Invitation

Come with me, you and I must be one here,  
Within the precinct of this shade, the leaves  
Of dogwood near and where the juniper  
And honeysuckle make their shadows one.

The dark and sweet involvements of the flower:  
No flower like this honeysuckle sprig.  
It must be breathed in deeply, slowly, sure –  
One gives one's being wholly to its scent.

The odorous soft petals on the face  
Will make you breathe that scent, as it should be,  
And you will have to breathe its deep perfume

And bear the change that comes then over you,  
As you are lulled and lapse into that place  
Of final darkness deeper than this shade.

## **Darkened Sun**

**D**arkened sun beyond the world's far rim,  
Only a twilit silence left to us.  
Cold wind across the dim and grey pasture,  
The tossing branches of the maple tree.

Beyond the earth-rim's jagged edge,  
Now black with ramifying portents,  
The shapes and figures of concluding days  
That lie before me, far beneath my foot.

The earth is turning slowly, and so fast,  
And I can feel the opening of night.  
The stars are scattered out across the sky.

There's only a faint outline in the west.  
The field is gone, the path invisible.  
Where shall I go now? Who will look for me?

## Departure

Now out the kitchen window the back yard  
Is dimly white beneath new-fallen snow.  
The lines fall slowly, silently, and turn  
The empty branches of the plum tree white.

I watch as heavy flakes fall down and down.  
Is it just snow that falls? And yet the earth  
Itself is falling silently through time.  
Tomorrow night whose foot prints will I find?

Who is it moving through the yard? No one,  
His step light on the Galilee of snow,  
Leaving no foot prints, guessed-at yet unseen.

No one is coming. Open the doors wide!  
Let in the gusts of starry cold night air.  
Then, without waiting further, I can leave.

## **Digging the Garden**

The earth, they say, is dark and secretive.  
Open the ground and see what you find there –  
Black grains of soil, black filaments of roots.  
The reek of mellow ground comes up to you.

The spade turns up night crawlers to the sun  
Or sometimes a large stone which stops the blade  
Until you scoop it around and work it loose.  
Or you'll come upon some old discarded thing –

A bottle cap, a spoon, a plastic toy.  
You'll never find what you might care to find.  
And yet small revelations. The weight

Of earth is learned one spadeful at a time.  
The drift of it is constant – not just down,  
But to the bottom of the deepest well.

## Search

Mysterious ripeness merely many leaves  
Falling and falling to the covered earth  
Now lying partly sheltered from our steps;  
Smoke of autumn fires fills the air,

Grey smoke of burnt-out evening, drifting through  
The silent fields. The sky's deep noble blue  
Where now the first stars shine, and up ahead  
The trees are black along the world's burnt rim.

The earth is hidden from us, ashen leaves  
Are dark and rustle softly under foot,  
Their branches, seen against the evening sky,

Are charred and burning still. Earth is not all.  
Slowly, very slowly now, the thought  
Of this comes home to us who linger here.

## Dark

You had forgotten we were supposed to meet  
Here in the complicated shade – oak leaves  
And dogwood branches, and where the juniper  
And honeysuckle blend their two shadows.

The dark and sweet involvements of the flower:  
No flower like this honeysuckle vine.  
It must be breathed in deeply, slowly; then  
One gives one's being wholly to its scent.

The fragrant and soft petals on your face  
Will make you know the dark, as it should be,  
As you will have to know all it implies,

Bearing the changes that then come over you,  
Deeper than shadow, yet not more than breath,  
A final darkness deeper than this shade.

## Intersection

I let the night's points drift along my hand  
As I lay in the deep grass, drifting out  
Myself among the shapes of stars and clouds  
Of vision in the time of night and sleep.

In this way realms are mingled in the night  
Which brings the time of intersections when  
Strange with pregnant being, and the world of light  
Now put aside, deep presence congregates.

The world becomes empowered and possessed  
And is a primitive and perfect realm,  
A realm of many realms, unpredictable,

Which intersect at points, at times, by chance  
Or by obscure conjunctions echoing  
In memory, which cannot comprehend.

## Earth Root

The serpent stump roots, reaching through the soil's dark,  
 Dream of the tree they once drew out so far  
 In echoing concentric layers of ring on ring,  
 That sailed so mast-like through the bright and  
hectic winds,  
 That reached so far beyond the dark roots of the sun.  
 The buried roots, sea phosphorescent synapses,  
 Still unstill in their night-filled earth-dreaming skull,  
 Can feel the rising tide-pull of the moon: bright touch –

And weightless – of the light of the world's fixed darkness,  
Shadow harp string ripples, silvery like dust,  
Of moon's glow through green amphitheaters of leaves,

Steps, so crushing heavy, of the shadow realm,  
Steps – yet empty, weightless – of another world  
Rising through this world, drawn up through dark passages.

## Early Summer Night

I open the back porch window. The night air  
Spills in with its cool dampness, with the scent  
Of elderberry and the mid-June grass.  
For that one instant night is just perfume

Diffused in darkness, while the stars drift off  
Sparkling coldly through the maple's leaves,  
And for the moment I can't quite recall  
Which is the near side of the window – night

Has taken hold, as inside presses toward  
The dark realm which so silently has flowed  
In through the screen I push my nose against.

Its cold metallic veil against my lips  
Deadens things a moment, though the stars  
Still drift, the cool breeze still stirs through the leaves.

## **Echo**

The fallen sun beyond the world's dark hills,  
Hills shriveled like burnt paper – folded, charred;  
The fallen sun beyond the burnt-off edge  
Where ember light is dying beneath its ash.

And stars are blown sparks scattered from the sheet  
Of burning paper that the earth now is,  
A paper burning, crumbling to bits  
Of ash – no more the legends of the world.

No longer to be seen or to be read,  
The earth is no more something for the eye,  
The sun's place empty, open to the night.

Instead of sun there's just the central sound  
Echoing, profound and widest silence,  
Freed from the shape or shadow of all words.

## Eclipse

The leaves fall with the autumn, darkness comes.  
What can we do as winter comes near to us?  
The eye of earth is closing on our steps,  
Closing beneath its lid, the soil's shell

We walk upon and crack and dent and craze.  
The shatters web the world they break apart,  
Not like the brown leaf's capillary web  
Held up to catch the light, the flow of light,

The feeling fiber-optics of the leaf  
That streams with sunlight, water, earth and air –  
Not seeing, searching; and not sought-for, found.

Smoke of the autumn fires in the air.  
At twilight gardeners rake the garden plots,  
Making their piles of dead stuff to burn.

## **The Edge of the Road**

The trees are cinders twisted in the red  
Light of the sunset. Blackened hills far off.  
Stars mapped and named along the winter sky  
Draw our gaze up and yet we feel the earth,

Now hard and frozen, underneath our feet.  
Your breath goes up like smoke, your face is cold.  
Half frozen now, your fingers and toes ache.  
You never drop your gaze from the night's stars.

Headlights coming toward you on the road,  
The pine wood as you pass; the maze of trees.  
Dark, confused paths on the frozen earth.

A shadow in the dark, you can't be seen  
Moving at road's edge, watching the starred sky.  
Your eyes so wide to take in the whole night.

## Ending

In autumn when the leaves are gone, the earth  
Is laid bare, naked of all covering:  
These are the trees, and yet are not the trees,  
These are the fields, and yet are not the fields.

The evening closes with its cobalt sky.  
The sky is not the sky – the empty space  
Is brimming with the end of fallen light.  
Stars are remnants; the earth is going cold,

Has fallen still – stiller and stiller now;  
The wind, so quiet now, is so alone,  
And footsteps echoing in darkened streets

Have hushed the last speech just before it came.  
The crumbled earthly fields are black; dusk-ash.  
Another world is waiting for our steps.

## Evening in Leaves

I sit here in the green of deepening shade  
Where I have come to watch the evening fall.  
The arbor's roofed and darkened with grape vines  
And honeysuckle climbs the latticed wall.

The bunches of the grapes hang down. Their vines  
Have broad green leaves that dapple out the sun,  
And through the small chinks in the matted green  
The sun's late orange is there in sparks and flares.

The scent of honeysuckle's in the air,  
A faint scent of the barely stirring breeze  
That stirs and stills the mind in green twilight.

I am the consciousness embowered here,  
The meditative self. And there, in flames,  
The dying god of evening in the leaves.

## February Evening

Late winter evening. Smoke-and-graphite clouds  
And freezing rain. Melted refrozen snow.  
The violet dusk air just turned to night.  
The four walls drove me out to walk the streets.

Drizzling rain freezing to a skin of ice  
Around black glycerin-coated branches.  
A street light just above a higher limb  
Is sepia and amber and looks submerged.

A steady aerosol of slanting rain  
Is falling falling falling past the light.  
Slush in the street looks like congealed wax

That pools around a wick. The blue-black street  
Is shiny, glistening where the snow is gone.  
Boots are soaked through. My toes sting with cold wet.

## **There Are Figures**

Accepting the illusions given, lent  
To us by worlds which yet withhold themselves,  
Rejecting what they give too willingly  
We look down through the tunnel of night trees,

The leaves of late spring, wild, many-shadowed, thick,  
Matte black, shaking in the moonlit breeze,  
Are cracked and veined and maculate with light,  
A shadow-body, tormented and fitful,

Shivering and flowing on stone-colored dust,  
Across the sidewalk's tilted cracking face,  
Blown light-networks in the gusts of wind,

Distended, flexing suddenly, blinked shut,  
Then opened, snapped back in the counter-breeze  
Blowing through the open spaces of the night.

## From Here

These crumbs of dirt I hold here in my hand –  
Grains of soil and seeds to be planted too,  
Like seeds of the spotted bean or wrinkled pea.  
Planting, I plant the earth, too, in the earth.

Soul grains as well. The spirit must be held.  
Light-clamor for waking eyes, choruses, tongue  
Twining with tongue, and opening voices wake –  
Wrapping constricting vine and burning flower.

Whisper of growth, yet what is coming? How?  
The hidden bares itself in the low and near,  
Flowers its promise from each moment's bud –

The moment holds yet vanishes. Now hold  
To the opening crumble of the soil  
Through which the ghostly earth rises to earth.

## Fullness

In slowness stem by stem and leaf by leaf,  
Beneath the August sun that brings each forth,  
Each thing attains itself: the plum its juice,  
Tomatoes rondure, flower their petals, all.

Each is made part of what the garden is.  
And the tangled deep involvement of their growth  
Resolves first to the order in each one  
And then into this single complex thing.

It bears an inner knowledge of itself,  
The garden in the silent heat of noon,  
And gradually made denser in its growth

By slow concretion of its minute points  
Of fibrous inward energy and strength  
Attains its intricate fullness in late August sun.

## **Garden Path**

The path leads down between the tall bean vines,  
All dripping rain which just this morning fell;  
One breathes the scent of summer's earth, the mingled  
Essences of day, of water, earth, and air.

And if you listen carefully you hear  
The water droplet dripping from its leaf  
To strike the leaf below, a tapping sound,  
A sound announcing present time, right now.

And in that perfect time you'll know the word,  
Compounded of the scent of earth and rain,  
Of standing in the garden being breath

Now taken in response to breath, enlarged,  
Empowered, deepened, fulfillment of the sense  
Of essences breathed in, of powers found.

## Going

Inside the furnace of the fallen sun  
The blackened letters of the world are burnt,  
The crumpled char of hills fed to its mouth.  
The tarnishing and molten stuff of clouds

Flows like a ship's wake, foam of the bright green sky.  
The earth is darkening from east to west,  
The sky, so filled with gold and opal clouds,  
Is swept away far to the end of days.

Slowly, silent, the furnace door is sealed.  
A horizontal line amid grey smoke.  
Above, and all around, sparks linger in the sky.

Now birds, in the stilling absence of the sun,  
Embellishing the silence of near night.  
Now wind in the aftermath. Now the uninhabited earth.

## **The Grape Arbor**

Sun fragments filter through the broad green leaves  
And remnants glow among cracks of the dirt floor.  
The table where I sit shows spots of light  
And marble-veins of light that waver, brighten,

Veer and scatter to blink shut when wind  
Blows through the overhanging tangled mass  
Of twilight shadows and the green sun-snake  
That, ramifying, broods upon me here.

The pulse of mind is held a prisoner,  
Like sight held captive in the throbbing eye  
And struggling in the capillaries' web.

And breath itself is trapped with bars of ribs  
Except where it escapes at nose or mouth.  
Yet where can the captive eye find its release?

## The Grass

Midsummer grass is high, waving, still green.  
And the pulsing luminous sun burns on.  
The heat is turning grass to hay right now,  
You almost feel the parching, it's so hot.

Tall grass that the wind ripples through at noon  
And which soaks up the light – I lay beneath  
And listened there. What sound did the day make?  
My hand searched through the thickest strands and weeds.

And down close to the soil I seemed to feel  
A steady warmth... archaic scent of earth,  
I knew its recessed being, breathed its life.

The heat of the long summer, the bright sun,  
Flowed through the grass, each blade a laughing tongue.  
Then all fell silent, stricken with the light.

## **The Green Germ**

**Y**our time is always passing. Here you are  
Awake and always feel it, constantly.  
Awake, and time is heavy, quick or slow,  
And moving in the processes of mind.

Yet this leaf of the green white-blooming pea  
Has its own silent being, its own time.  
Its life is sleep, yet time moves in the leaf  
And flows in movements deeper than water, light.

And time is opening the climate where  
The green germ of all being grows and blossoms  
In the process of its deep intent

And dies – the rhythm of this flow within  
The space cleared out in emptiness, the stroke  
And counter-stroke that sounds in that stillness.

## **In the Garden**

Something is hidden in the earth, but what?  
And constantly eludes both eye and hand.  
It is not in the soil that I take  
In handfuls from the ground still damp with rain,

Nor in the delicate blossoms of the peas,  
And in the fibers of the leaf when sometimes  
I have torn it thread by thread to separate  
The inner filaments, it is not there.

More deeply in the substance of the earth,  
Down deep into the root and past the root  
Into the darkness where all sleep is from

And where it comes at last, it is not there;  
Nor in the merest crumb of soil, nor in  
The scattered loose pebbles, not there at all.

## Heat

I walked the ten miles here this afternoon,  
The dust that's on my shoes is from the road  
Where shards of gravel glittered in the sun  
And hot light struck the melting asphalt strip.

A watery heat shimmer like gas fumes  
Was all I knew ahead, and all behind.  
I walked between two open furnaces  
As though from fire to frying pan to fire.

At times my shoes stuck to the melting road.  
I pulled them loose, and when I did it left  
A toffee-pull of tar like chewing gum.

In the middle of the drought, when nothing grows,  
I walked beneath high glories – on bright dust  
Like metal shavings, and all hot and still.

## Hot and Bright

What is this simple substance, summer's heat?  
Bright being of sunlight and heat of day,  
The medium in which we live and move –  
The light shines warm upon my outstretched hand.

Resigned to live the processes of earth –  
The burning floor of time, its lacks and flaws –  
I nonetheless seek out its principles,  
Lying here in shade, light-riddled leaves

Above me and their partial shade around.  
You move through the warm currents of midday  
And feel yourself a part of what is here.

And yet what is? Stray shards of thought offered –  
Bright blears and streaks, gold filaments fallen  
As I think to grasp, to hold...and think once more.

## Hot Day

The sun this afternoon, so bright and hot,  
Warms the stagnant odors of the field,  
Stirs them just slightly – the scents of earth and grass,  
The odors of day, the essences of day.

The field is stifling, still, at this hot hour.  
The air so bright seems full of presences,  
Half dreaming sunlight of the afternoon.  
Slowly it gets hotter, deepening

The constant hum; the watery heat-blur,  
Shimmering, quivers on the far-off strip  
From which I've turned to walk in waist-high grass.

The air though still is audibly astir  
With flies and gnats, cicadas, honeybees –  
Time burning in the simmer of the day.

## **If Light Creates the Most Intense Desire**

If light creates the most intense desire –  
The gold yet warm reflected radiance  
Bonnard dreamed for his woman endlessly  
Afloat that entranced and weightless moment,

The waters of desire turned to light –  
What happens then with darkness? What does it bring?  
Night falls across the chapel of glass tiles,  
The bright form darkens and then disappears.

The bright form turns to canvas in the hand.  
Desire takes up its mere implements,  
And later ink will dry on the white page.

Her form that moves all Danae to the light,  
A room entirely washed in radiance –  
Vision breaks at last, like waves, into the world.

## **The Image**

The sun is warm and the air is quiet, still,  
So, murmuring, the bees will never cease  
Or seem not to: some single constant sound  
Just present in the day, a hum or less,

Some echo, some activity, something –  
Felt in this quality of warmth and light  
That like the bees will also never cease.  
The noon heat echoes and compounds itself.

I've sat here for an hour, maybe two.  
There isn't anything I want, just this  
Receptive quiet echoing within

The sense of light and warmth upon my skin  
And in my mind, in that eye there and that body,  
The scent of earth, though present, nearly gone.

## **In the Grass**

This noon beneath the shadows of the leaves  
That wavered in the sun and the warm wind  
I watched a single point there in the grass,  
My face close to the ground, touched by the grass:

A scrutiny beyond the light of noon  
Where daylight never comes, where soil breathes forth  
Its earthen fragrance to the white grass stems,  
Amid the shadows, there in the green shade.

I saw each minute cranny, and each stem  
Lead downward to its root within the earth.  
And there down near the soil the scent of earth,

The scent of what is deepest, I breathed it in.  
And there the eye is closed. But in what sleep?  
What roots did my hands touch? What earth was this?

## Inner Life

And what is the intensity of life?  
That pole beans twine the stake, that leaves stretch wide,  
Spreading their rivulets of lucent veins  
Out toward the sun and even past the sun.

Inner compulsion burns the autumn leaf.  
What is the grieved-for substance that I taste  
In every breath of leaf-smoke in cold air  
Or damp grass matted with the evening chill?

How many times removed, and then removed  
Again from what we are? To stand and feel  
As leaf-fall darkens around the twilight gaze.

I breathe the air that once was warm; my skin  
Feels chill at evening; night dew slowly spreads.  
The knowledge held inside me waits for me.

## **The Invisible Sea**

You lay a long time with eyes closed, asleep  
I thought, until my watching brought a grin.  
And now we feel the dampness – night's black rain.  
The trees foam like a surf, the curtains flap.

Questioning me, you say you're "curious."  
Get the dictionary for me, look it up.  
I want to know the sources of this word,  
Just so I'll know the sources of your thought,

The feelings that you have, or, if not that,  
The silent, sensed activity beneath  
The surface of your skin, your beauty's form.

That has a surface, as dark water does.  
The night sea is an eye, its eyelid closed.  
With what beneath? A sea of lidded eyes?

## Involved

The evening's sun is caught in latticework  
Of leaves and flowers on the tangled wall,  
The leaves' half deep green shade and half sunlight  
That leaves the underside of each leaf gold.

And in that gold set off against the dark  
The body of each leaf must softly glow,  
The yellow aura of the light, day's sun  
Now lingering warm upon the massed tangle.

I sit here in the darkening shadows –  
The evening's cool and infiltrating breeze.  
The cloudy grapes hang down, their curling vines

Around my face. A woman's hair unbound.  
And I could almost reach up with my hand,  
Tangling my fingers in it endlessly.

## **Inward, Downward**

What am I doing on my hands and knees?  
My hands six inches deep in the damp soil,  
The canopy of pole beans over me  
And shading out the hottest of the sun.

Looking for something hidden and then lost?  
I've crouched here since this morning. Now it's noon  
And even in the shade my shoulder burns  
Beneath the hot day's infiltrating sun.

My hands come to the opened up black soil  
And find small stones and smaller crumbs of dirt,  
The finest thread-like roots, as fine as hairs,

And then a slit of darkness, like a well,  
Where sheltered in the partial shade of leaves  
One looks into a mirror on which to dwell.

## **Jar of Honey**

Sweet substance, the dark effluence of light,  
When it's been slowly gathered by the bees  
And filled their secret cells with chemistries  
Of an amber suavity, distilled sunlight.

As when a mist is beaded into drops  
That glistens on the edges of the leaf,  
The summer's light and heat are transformed here  
Into this slow sweet fluid, suspension of time.

Now tip the jar of honey and pour forth  
Summer in gradually augmenting plies  
Of clarity, its dark radiance, sharp warmth,

Light-haunted wave, profusion of new light,  
Life and active power and new strength,  
That rises and then falls off, endlessly.

## **Late at Night**

We lie beside each other, and you sleep  
Washed in the absolution of that blank  
Which must be, certainly, a hopeful thing.  
For as you burrowed down into your nest

Of blankets, insulating you, and warm –  
A fetus curled toward involuted space,  
Quiet, remote by inches, by whole worlds –  
I ran my hand along your hip and thigh

As though to bless, as though to say farewell  
And hasten you along toward your own best,  
Your proper and your most desired good.

Then when you wake is it likewise a good?  
My blessing follows you...out of the world,  
And into it again...and out of it.

## **Late Hour**

Darkness of evening violet, thunder clouds,  
The tangle of the garden like black crepe  
Hanging in ragged tatters, agitated  
By the intermittent wind. The deep black trees.

Orange poppies nod above the ashen ground.  
The yard is just a smudge of charcoal,  
The path a smear of grey. Only the wind,  
The leaves of the plum tree clatter in the wind.

How long since any of them came here last?  
Yet who are they? The traces left don't tell.  
The answer shuts its eye with the last light.

The world is very still and quiet now.  
Black garden and black ground; the cindered tree.  
Think of the days, that never can return.

## Leaves, Events

The leaf is parched beneath the August sun  
And then, dropped lightly from the tall bean plant,  
The intricate curling tendrils and green vines  
And white-pink flowers tangling in the heat,

It flutters down still, soil-scented air  
And comes to rest upon the garden's floor  
While overhead the August sun shines on  
And pours its warmth and light intensely down.

I hear the hushed activity of day  
Seeming to creep through every leaf and vine  
And turning to a dense entangling web

Of growth, decay, these numberless events,  
Such as the falling of the sun-parched leaf,  
That point by point articulate the world.

## Longing

Stranger to opening, the earth itself  
Opens its secrets to the evening sun,  
The breaking light-spokes touch along the field  
That lies in stubble, shorn and darkening.

Though never ripe itself, the earth is filled  
In filling the round apple, the corn's green stalk.  
The black dirt path that opens up between  
The two brown, matted fields of wild grass

Is leading us to where it will not say.  
A crack along the surface of a cup  
Will draw the hand's thumbnail to chip it more,

Effortless, unconscious, steadily.  
Our hands reach out along the darkened hills,  
They reach out far beyond the sunset's light.

## Midsummer

The sun is hot today, the air is still  
And fragrant in the garden's atmosphere,  
The green tomatoes on the window sill  
Are ripened in the sun and the open air.

Each leaf and every green vine and white flower  
Takes in the light and heat of midday sun,  
The day is hot and silent, heat whispers  
The wakening stir of growth within each stem.

Take up a handful of the garden's earth  
Still damp and cold despite the midday heat.  
What is the dark empowerment that's there? –

The slow fulfillment of the springtime seed,  
The flowers and green leaves beneath the sun,  
The white pea blossoms burning in the light.

## Morning

What do you say of man, moment by moment?  
His rod between your teeth, his hair in flame,  
Then falling with the day, his burnt-out form  
An upright cinder walking the black earth.

From the root and from the vine then what can come?  
Light opens in the blood behind my eyes  
As breath is clenched then opened, opened outward,  
Outward still more – Come to me, light within!

The world lies open, weightless in my grasp,  
The quaking luminous aura of the day –  
Blue sky, darkly connected with my life.

Yet how? Blueness past the blue, so far, so far....  
The calm cannot but fall. A limit set.  
And yet I cannot help but wake once more.

## Night in the Arbor

And on the stillness of the night air this,  
The sweetest honeysuckle scent that drifts  
And permeates the summer night, a thought  
Disclosed within the arbor's deepest shade.

What is the secret of the arbor now  
When all the night is silent and the breeze  
Has for so long not stirred the jasmine leaf  
Nor lightly touched the roses on the wall?

The silence of the night is like a thought,  
The almost unknown word upon your lips  
You cannot speak, for you are it yourself.

A deeper silence gathers to a point  
Within your heart, and, spoken in one word,  
Becomes your surest knowledge, clear and true.

## Night Garden

I've found this entrance to the night's garden,  
Where I have crawled on hands and knees to touch  
The damp leaves of the flowers with my tongue  
Or part the midnight soil with my nose.

My eyes were level with the lowest vines  
As through the night I studied the slow slug  
And traced dark wisdom in its filmy track  
Not figured in the clustering summer stars.

At times I let him crawl out on my hand  
And leave behind his silken residue  
From which I got the feeling, the deep sense,

Of everything that grows and lives and dies  
By touch of flesh to flesh, by being flesh  
Amid the realms of water, earth, and air.

## Nightplace

What can be done to you? The wind blows through  
Your clothing as you stagger and then fall.  
The stars are small words dribbling from your mouth.  
The night spins in your wide aphasic glance.

Here cannot be here. Snow drifts blow on  
Like sand dunes over tall grass, fences, posts.  
Lower and lower; night is hovering.  
The world is all of this – handfuls of snow.

The world is all of this. Therefore rejoice!  
The snow blows on and on. There's nothing left.  
Just something in these million crystals -- bright,

Not lost, not found, not counted, and not old.  
The burial of snow; the age of night.  
The dark of winter fields for miles and miles.

## Noon

The leaves catch fire from the sun. At noon  
A burning in the plum tree's green branches  
Burns through with its uninterrupted light;  
One scarcely, for the glare, can see the leaves

That now half leaf, half glare of midday sun  
Are all of light, all fire and points of fire  
Embodied in one flame burning together –  
The fire, the leaves, the halo around them,

The sunlight's harsh aura: a single flame  
Which is the visible energy of day,  
Beneath the sky's blank luminous abyss,

Burning through the green of every leaf –  
Each stem, each branch, the thick roots of the tree,  
All rooted in the sun, formed out of light.

## Opening to Outward

I lay there in the grass. I had come out  
At midnight to the backyard just to see  
What August's stars would look like seen against  
The dark corona of the tall plum tree.

The grass touched at my ear, and looking up,  
My head against its foot, I saw the trunk  
Which curved up toward that region that was night  
Where its weird umbel of green branches swayed

In the warm hypnotic breeze – metallic dust  
Of stars a cobalt blue night rain come down  
Around the nodding branches over me.

The constellations turned and turned, the ground  
Beneath me drifted slowly out among  
The heavens, circling the earth's dark axis.

## Origin

The leaves like paper rattling, dust-dry –  
This and the blinded spirit in the ground,  
His cries and cries; he tears to be released.  
The hand that tears itself becomes the tear.

The rip is opened up between the legs;  
The blood cannot but flow. The wound is eaten.  
The famishing dilemma fixes one  
Like a moth pulsing in the spider's clench.

The embers in the grate – scattered, pin points –  
Falling and falling over the burnt-out world,  
The paper world, the ashen world, these stars –

The earth-rim opened to the depths of night,  
Embers and silence fall around us here,  
The earth the shadow that we sometimes feel.

## Origin and End

The sun burns down, baking the field, the ground  
Which brings forth from its sleep activity  
Within the seed, and brings the seed at last  
In leaf and flower to the summer's day.

This is the fibrous stem, and this the root  
That leads to that entangling of threads  
Within the dark recesses of the soil,  
Into the dreamt-of potency of earth,

Into the very being, the one life  
Which brings itself at last into the sun,  
In which the gardener's hand must do its work.

For earth, in its betrayal, has made that  
Which binds the hand in dark entanglements  
To work in its own origin and end.

## **The Other Realm**

Another world beyond our world, listening  
To empty speech like rustling dry leaves,  
Like dry leaves burning or like paper burnt,  
The paper of burning books and cities burned,

The world, the listening world beyond our own,  
Where can it be? I know yet do not know.  
I feel the earth around me as it drifts  
And falls away, complete, a finished thing.

Now something else is rising in the night,  
The darkness fills with possibilities.  
What listens is not part of something more,

Structures encompassing a smaller one.  
It lingers here beside us, shadow-like,  
Called from a different sun, a different earth.

## **The Place**

Come with me to my work this afternoon.  
We'll walk down through the rows of staked pole beans,  
So thickly tangled, shading out the sun,  
And see the yellow bumblebees climb there

And hear their drowsy murmur in the vines.  
The sun will stipple noon glare in the leaves  
And touch with gold light the flowers of the beans,  
The white translucent flowers in that light,

Its delicate clear petals luminous  
In dappled light and shade, one moment there.  
It will, that flower, be a sort of pledge

That's made with you and that you recognize.  
And in the hot still noon the garden's air  
Will settle, thicken, gather atmosphere.

## Point by Point

Darker points zigzag here and there – the grass,  
The clover, full of tiny shadows,  
The sunny green of crowded clover leaf  
That seems to make a green carpentry of sun.

Yet chinks of shade are mingled in as well.  
The sun is warm, the afternoon is bright,  
Breeze-blowing as I lie here on the grass  
Propped on my elbow, the sun burning my face.

Then other shadows zigzag here and there,  
Waver – so unsteady – in peripheral sight.  
If you look deliberately it's just sun glare,

But then another spot veers on the grass.  
Then there are two, then three – four honeybees  
Rummage in the thick white clover flower.

## Portents

Green twilight and the purple-cindered clouds  
Glow with red-ember scorings in late sun,  
Smoke-like recessions open and flow and close.  
The sky is deep blue in the east, storm tatters.

The wind is bright, at intervals sun-sparks  
From blackened rooftops west. Dispersing clouds  
Flow toward the blinding, setting sun; the sky  
Is full of movement and dark flocks of birds.

Branches of the plum tree waver, carbonized  
In dim red light that spaces burning roofs.  
Black galls are on the branches; the cancered tree.

Now everything flows west. The wind makes all  
The movement in the sky of light and clouds  
Feel like part of a process here on earth.

## Powers

That day the uncut field, the grass waist high,  
Midsummer's grass with pollen in the light,  
Its dust in drifting stillness in the air,  
A silence in the heat all afternoon.

A clearness in the far air of the field,  
The yellow sun, the clearest warmth of light,  
Beneath, the sunlit grass in which the breeze  
Would ripple slowly with its passing wave.

I lay there for a while and listened close:  
I heard the sound of water, the small creek  
That flowed along the roadside's low fenced edge:

The sound, the light, the light and water's flow,  
The sound of water and the flow of light  
Within, along the edges of the field.

## **Prospect, Mid-Winter**

The sun is down below the far hill's edge.  
Its last and distant light can scarcely glance  
Through cold ice-mist that skirts the spruce-dark hill.  
Cold blue of evening, breath-mist on the air.

The hills are amber and the last sun gone  
Beneath green auras of the burnt-off trees.  
The sky is changing, opening to the stars,  
Evening purples and darkens the sun-void.

The shadows lengthen through the valley's cleft.  
The ashes of snow fields are charred black,  
The river a dim crease in charcoal dust.

The world is like a burnt coal going dead.  
How total darkness takes the valley whole.  
Where can our home be on the frozen earth?

## **Paths of Crystal**

Enter the dream of darkness, as of light.  
Just as the light dreamed once, darkness dreams too.  
We are its shadows, our footsteps creak in snow.  
The snow is full of hidden light. Blue dusk.

The cold blue light of snow shines inwardly  
To each one walking here. Blood freezes still.  
Yet thought continues without blood, ice blood.  
The miracle of breath, unfrozen still.

"I" is collected in the wind; voices.  
Blue dusk is full of eyes, the night more so.  
The snow itself holds voices, memories,

Yet they're all gone now, although never gone.  
Dark memories torment our steps. Yet bathe  
Your face in snow, to freeze it and know light.

## Recollection

Where has he gone, who climbed the twilight tree,  
Among the violet shadows, the mauve-gathered light,  
The clustering, black and ragged leaves afloat  
Amid the dimness of the falling gold?

Then, at that moment, promises lay dead  
And radiance withdrawn from the earth,  
The purpling distended shadows bled  
From garden bench and from the house's eaves.

Lie on the damp grass, let the night come on.  
The flicker of the grass blade from your breath,  
The tickling of the grass blade through your ear...

The coldness of the grass against your face...  
The hardness of the ground against your cheek.  
You feel the clouds still moving through dim light.

## **Searching through the Many-Leaved Night**

The earth is listening beyond the night  
For answering worlds arising in the dark  
And stirring from its own forgotten life,  
One earth of many worlds, that wake, that sleep,

An earth now listening beyond the world  
That echoes with our voices and our steps.  
Deep focus night, an eyeless pupil, clear  
Of blind intentions and of images,

Now deepened by a single falling leaf,  
A tiny scraping sound that scatters thought,  
Here on the sidewalk, the world's unbroken crust.

I feel another life within the one we have,  
Life always sought-for and yet never found,  
Not greater but set just inside our own.

## Season of Quiet

Season of quiet, of the falling leaf,  
Enigma of the silent afternoon,  
So still and blue; high sunlit golden leaves  
In auras of the sun from which they fall.

And sunlight filters, searches through the tree  
In bright rays and in dusty slanted beams:  
Light echoing in laden, golden boughs  
Like whispers whispered in a silent church.

Our silent speech, our speech of many leaves,  
Has fallen underneath our feet, become  
The papery surface that we walk upon,

The thing of which the dreamt-of earth is made.  
What is the season of quiet speaking now,  
Here in the other world quite set apart?

## September Afternoon

Mid-afternoon. The field in September  
Humming softly, filling its own silence,  
Is filled with sunlight. Emptiness is filled  
With warm sun and with small white butterflies.

I stand in waist-high grass. It sways and sifts  
Around me almost audibly, opening;  
I walk through and it crackles under foot  
Then rises back up slowly where I've passed.

The field opening: a circle spreads  
With ripples rippling as my wake fades out.  
I crouch down low, the same height as the grass,

And listen where the afternoon burns low,  
Embers simmering around me, and the day  
Is warm and still, and stiff grass taps my cheek.

## Shapes of Light

I sat in the arbor, resting, almost asleep,  
My eyes half closed upon the shade the sun  
Flaked through – its light mote-spinning, checkering  
The grass and picnic table and the chairs.

The leaves and lattice broke the glare in shapes –  
A papery rustling plane of shadows  
With streaks of molten sun behind, within,  
Blazing figures there – stem and leaf auras,

A burning depth beyond shadow, or woven  
In the patterns of the vines and leaves,  
Or merely apparent in that latticed area,

That realm of space, enclosed, not very deep,  
Yet deep enough to draw the eye, the mind,  
Seeking out substance and finding shards of light.

## **Snowbed**

The snow falls through the night, the night through time.  
I lie here in the snow, pinned like a moth  
Between the two wings that I made myself.  
Snow falls. Or is it I that drift upward,

Falling toward the sky, through space and time?  
My ears sting numbly in the freezing snow.  
I spread my arms out wider still to hold  
The emptiness of white that fills the sky,

That covers up the ground, that falls to earth  
And covers me, a stranger fallen here.  
My two spread wings are like an hour glass too,

And I the narrow waist where white sand falls.  
I am the sand that falls, the snow that falls.  
What will be left when all the sand runs through?

## Snowpath

Darkness before the face: the eye must search.  
The hand can only touch what can't be held,  
The step can only tread what flows away  
From underneath the foot. We fall and fall

Like someone climbing up a hill of grain,  
The millet grains of time that open up  
Beneath the foot while closing overhead.  
Time is the depth of night – so on-and-on,

Far toward the frozen black of winter sky,  
Or down beneath your foot, shrunk tinily  
Within the interlocking cells of snow.

Snow is my metaphor for time that falls  
And covers us and which we cannot touch  
Since, at our freezing dying touch, it melts.

## **Snow Valley**

Fields of bright snow along the valley's floor –  
The river frozen in its banks of light  
Creases the glitter of white distances,  
A living unhealed fissure, a faint scar.

The valley holds all sunlight in itself.  
Dazzling sun-fields to the east and west  
Won't bear to be looked at; cold radiance  
Aching in the eye that tears and blurs.

The sun hangs over the abyss of light.  
Below the hand's edge shielding my eyes  
It seems a relatively small white disc.

The sky is absolutely clear and blue.  
The river valley burns like phosphorous  
With glowing sun-mist and bright smoky light.

## **Sound, Light and Time**

Murmuring in the flowers of the peas  
The bees will hover in the tangled vines,  
Attracted by the white pea blossoms' scent  
That comes out all the more in day's warm light.

At noon within the arbor, flowered vines  
Of honeysuckle and grape leaves catch the sun  
That makes a dappled sparkling in the leaves –  
All day the bees inhabiting that light,

All afternoon inhabiting the sun  
That shines down with its bright transparent warmth;  
The midday's sunlight, the vine's white flowers,

Both burn together the long afternoon.  
The bees take in the warmth, move in that radiance.  
The gardener hears them when he comes at noon.

## Spring

This is the start of spring shoots from the rain,  
The arching bean sprout, carrot stems light green,  
The onion put forth newly from the dirt,  
The scented basil leaf, the pepper plant,

The squash with yellow flowers and broad leaves  
That catch the rain in droplets running down,  
Tomatoes with their still-green buds of fruit,  
The plum branch with its delicate white flower;

The foam-white flowers of the berry canes  
That bunch in thick sprays swaying in the breeze,  
The white-pink blossoms of the peas just come,

The tangled pole bean vines, their broad green leaves  
In which the bees will hover hunting flowers,  
The sun that shines down the whole afternoon.

## Summer

The time has come when berries ripened black  
Are full upon their stems and pendulous  
And lolling woozily with every breeze  
That rustles them and rustles their green leaves.

They're of the time that sleeping in its heat  
And in its mystery of fruitfulness  
That slumbers in the dark reticulum  
Of buried roots and marrow of the stems,

Brings forth its many flowers to the sun,  
The fruit in which the heat of summer runs  
And into which the heat of summer flows,

Bringing its seasonal eternal fire,  
And turning peach to peach and plum to plum  
As well as all the garden to the fall.

## Terminus

And is the spirit of the flesh from soil?  
Is it received from there? If not, then where?  
I cannot help to disentangle mind  
From breath, breath from body, mind from earth.

Nor have I thought that is not bound to pain  
Or pain that is not part of life and thought.  
Everything's bound, unbound, and then rebound –  
One complex of responsibility,

One act of moving through the partial world  
Bearing the burden which must be assumed  
So that the world be truly borne and lived.

That's all you're given, that must be everything.  
Don't wait for certainty which cannot come,  
Nor crave what can't exist, and never has.

## **The Spring Beneath the Surface of the Spring**

The dew's still on the grass, the air is damp,  
A cool night mist still lingers on each leaf.  
Things are in their twilight, not yet the sun –  
The garden has not felt the touch of day.

The moisture settles, beads on every leaf,  
Each stem, each blade of grass is wet with it,  
As though emerged just now, grown separate  
From something in the night, or from the mist.

Out of the mist, emerging from the night  
And dim shining dew, the vines and leaves  
Are wet and new as though just now come forth

From that which is the darker principle,  
The flowing stream, the cold and hidden spring  
That lies beneath the surface of the earth.

## **Thaw in Earliest Spring**

Here is the branch I've broken from the tree  
And this the ice that's heavy crusted on  
With glassy crystals dripping in the sun  
And water droplets running down my wrist.

And in each drop the bright sun glints and shines  
And warms the frozen fibers of the branch,  
Making them bend and supple with new blood  
That runs beneath the ice until it thaws.

The warmth that flushes through the deepest grain  
And fills the inner fibers with new life  
From which the blossoms flower in their time

Moves also through the blood with its new pulse  
And grows into a warming of the heart  
Bringing the driest sticks to bear their flower.

## Those Waiting

Gold and copper clouds, bright amber tints  
Across the rain-damp and acid-green lawn.  
The tree limbs blacken in declining light,  
The marigolds are rust; spider-shadow trees.

The one who cannot speak and cannot know  
Watches the end of light; the evening wind  
Moves every leaf and tendril of the garden,  
Which ripples, and the garden aches for light.

But we, who cannot speak, don't want the light,  
Who neither speak nor hear, who never know  
The world as it is given to the eye

But taste and grieve it, aching, its scent, its life –  
Of wood grain, rotting wood, the wet soft grass.  
Branches are cinders now and damply burn.

## Threshold

The letters of the world are lost beyond recall  
Inside the darkness of the setting sun.  
Beyond the chary lid of the black hill,  
Where many trees are burnt to thin match sticks,

The sun itself drops like a small tablet  
Quickly dissolving in the glass of night.  
The effervescence of its yellow green  
Is still seen, though – long, silent echoing.

Night of the word: dark rumors in the wind.  
And, slightly louder, too, the rustling sound  
Of papers underneath an old man's head.

Night of the world: I hear the silences,  
The voices of the tortured, the drip of blood,  
The rustle of silk scarves and currency.

## **Time and Place**

The day is hot and still this afternoon,  
There is no breeze, just quiet in the field  
That lies beneath the yellow sun's clear light  
And where no stem, no leaf, no grass can stir.

And time is silenced, silence is the time  
That does come to pass but simply is.  
The day is one transparent realm of light  
And, in the silence, the cicada's sound:

A humming in the wide hush of the field,  
The sound of heat, the sound of noon itself,  
Heard in the total stillness of the day.

And one hears something present in the day  
And found within the light, within the field,  
Within each stem, each leaf, each blade of grass.

## **To You**

Come to the garden, breathe the damp night air  
In which are scents of wet earth and wet grass.  
Now break a plum branch from the dewed plum tree...  
Yes, it too has its scent of the rainy night.

Split the plum and let its dark juice flow  
Until it drips down chin and hand. The tongue  
Must taste it all – what else can it do?  
The night and grass, the night and rain and wind.

And now the garden shivers rustling around you  
As you stand and breathe the air, the hour's lateness,  
Breathing it in a sense more deep than breath.

We are surrounded by the garden's world.  
You take it in and cannot get away from it.  
You cannot get away from that one scent.

## Traces, Paths

The shadows of the trees darken and reach  
And crumble the cracked sidewalk in their web.  
Vein-shadows of tree limbs, blood-sparks of light  
With, here and there, a beam of iodine

Through charring and massed embers; the green west –  
Hills grow more distant, light is opening,  
Space is a burnt out ruin, earth-light grows dark,  
The earth turns, falling down through space and time.

Our steps make only dark paths on its surface.  
These -- in the silence spoken by the sun  
That hushes the world, blowing daylight out –

I feel as drumming rain through realms of leaves,  
As echoes through the ground. Twilight grows still.  
Yet a word thought in the silence echoes far.

## Twilight Arbor

This quiet of the summer's garden – now  
Evening air deepens as the sun goes down.  
The shadows lengthen steeply on the grass,  
The air is cooler, darkness coming in.

The yellow roses in the evening's light  
Are rustled just a little by the breeze  
That brings the scent of flowers and damp earth  
To where I sit here watching, listening.

I hear the humming of the twilight beetle.  
Some bees have stayed on from the midday heat;  
They buzz and glint among the flowering peas

Or hover near the roses on the wall.  
And one can almost hear the moths now out:  
Their faintest sounds the sounds of coming night.

## Two

Come out to meet me at the garden's edge.  
Some sprigs of mint I have still wet with rain  
That shaken out leave droplets on the hand.  
The scent of dampened earth now rises up

As I break off a small sprig with its leaves.  
Each leaf is three plied, branching through the night.  
Dew glistens tinily like hidden stars.  
The dark is opening to more than dark.

This is the place, this arbor, and the time,  
The time when night is still and close, the scent  
Of honeysuckle in the midnight breeze,

When breath elicits the response of breath,  
Desire of desire, touch of touch,  
When all is given that fulfills this night.

## **Under the Spring**

Take up a handful of the garden's earth –  
The sun's come back with mild breeze, and the rain  
Soaks and penetrates the crumbling ground,  
Bringing forth new complexities of growth.

The tentative strong stirring in the roots  
Conceives the dense involvement, the new life  
Which moves a presence latent in each part,  
Expressed in each, and gathering in all.

What is it in the root and stem and leaf?  
Impalpable flux accumulating form  
And bringing to fulfillment that which is

And still must be, the unarrestable  
Current lying hidden in plain sight,  
Within the marrow, on the surface, always now.

## Valley Edge, Winter

The sun is high above the new snow fields.  
The white hills burn and throb in the bright day.  
My breath is dry-ice vapor and the sky  
Is absolutely empty, a clear pale blue.

There's hardly any wind, no sound at all,  
No passing cars; the highway opposite,  
Along the valley's slope, is like a strip  
Of zinc or silver, shining in the sun.

Near in the topmost boughs of the fir tree,  
A filmy slip-stream glitter of sun-snow  
Veils and eddies, blown away into the air.

Along the valley's frozen floor, the gray  
Congealed wax, the river's skin of ice,  
Sparkles with tufts and white rosettes of snow.

## **Waking in the Sun**

I lay with eyes half closed to the hot sun  
Holding its quivering light inside my lashes.  
I dreamed a dim sound – the wind, somewhere...  
And woke to find a breeze sifting tall grass.

It fluctuated odors settled there  
Through afternoon's hot silence. A still haze  
Hummed so loudly as I woke; the sky,  
So hotly blue, had three white cumuli.

I'd dreamed myself dead perhaps, forgotten, lost  
To the world – this really just the dream  
The soul makes in its longing troubled sleep,

A dream of separation at an end.  
I woke to find myself amid bright day,  
My face burned by the sun, my head spinning.

## **Walking through the Dark**

Passages always waiting for my step –  
Gateways through the overhanging leaflets  
Of October's midnight trees: green moonlight  
And zebra shadow stripes of darkness.

I walk from frame to frame – each sidewalk crack –  
And sense the strange blank spots in the film  
(Which all flash by so dazzlingly fast)  
Must hold the deep reality one feels

In glimpses of sudden clarity, or dreams.  
Yet how can you approach it, here and now?  
Where shadow-doors from shadow-scrimmed tree boughs

Are woven things, textiles of light and dark,  
To touch perhaps, yet not to press beyond,  
And so much more like things to be tangled in.

## **Water**

The waters of the night move through the mind  
And dim the eye which closes up in sleep  
Drowning in its depths, the deepest well  
Of all and dark with its original night.

The mere self cannot budge out of its realm  
Despite the alchemy and charm of dreams,  
Although I must turn over now and drift  
In the moonlight vortex of sleep's water spun

Around the bubble of the mind, within  
The nutshell of the skull and in the walnut  
Convolutions of the brain dry as a nut.

And yet maybe the sleepers will join hands –  
The ghostly morris in that hidden world,  
Covered by moonlight, moving through every mind.

## **Wet Morning**

This morning on the garden's path the vines  
Were beaded by a vague pearl mist of rain  
That sparkled on the flowers and broad leaves  
And lightly wet the walker as he passed –

The green vines weighted with the cool water,  
And down the middle of each leaf a furrow  
For the rain that's runneled into drops  
And dripping down from leaf to lower leaf.

The mist is on the garden, its black soil  
Made blacker with the wet, crumbling in the hand,  
As an earthy scent of dampness rises up.

And with all this the sound of dripping leaves  
That breathe the garden's damp. And there you stand  
And breathe in every breath as deep as life.

## **In the White Field**

Immediate and silent, frozen still,  
The night has no beginning and no end;  
The winter stars, at the edge of present time,  
Fall every instant farther and farther

Out of reach – my single outstretched hand....  
The past must fall away from us,  
The wakeful present vaporizing away  
As less than breath, as less than present time.

Nearly the fabled life again, and then  
Not quite, again. The moment, older now,  
Is frozen till it cracks. The night is wide,

Silent where a field of moonlight and white snow  
Is like the bare board of a mirror's face,  
Imageless and not to be broken through.

## Winter

The burning of white snow, bright blinding ground  
Reflecting the icy glories of midday  
And doubling them with its own light, auras  
Of sunlight from the lightly covered earth –

Augmenting light with echoes, echoing  
Its instantaneous presence, silent  
Fury, its illimitable glory,  
Its intangible and yet visible power –

The turning of the light to more than light,  
A power of the scarred and barren earth  
Numbed in the anesthesia of the cold –

Is it an end or is it a beginning,  
The snow's light, sheer and unapproachable?  
Where is it from? What could come after it?

## Words to Silence

Leaf veins and veins in the light that flow  
Toward me, to me, becoming me – my thought  
Can never trace the root of thought's response  
Nor yet my tongue the baffled root of speech.

But in the veins of light and arteries  
Of darkness, the darkness bleeding through  
The quickening mesh of captivating light,  
I sense and feel and want, yet do not know.

I do not need to know, and yet still need.  
Dark bleeds through the brightness of the web,  
Flowing as substance outward into light,

Flowering in my many flowers of speech.  
And then returns, as leaves into the ground,  
As blood into the heart, as words to silence.

## **A Path**

Sun spreading gold and crimson, and pink light  
Pours on the tawny hill that's facing it.  
I face it too, I walk straight into it.  
I have to raise my hand before my face  
To see the budding tree that's leaved in glare.  
Because I cannot see that place beyond  
The burning disk, just past the streaming hills,  
Beyond the light, beyond the burnt-off edge  
That marks the final boundary of thought,  
The limit of all speech, and of desire,  
Of aspirations, even the end of time,  
Because I want to see that radiant place  
Beyond the point of light, I go out now,  
Out walking, walking, looking straight ahead,  
Half blind yet trying still to see past the end.

## FOR TRAKL

### Along

The grapes have been cut and the sheaves;  
The town in autumnal peace.  
A hammer and anvil ring without cease,  
Laughter among crimson leaves.

Now to the pale child bring an aster,  
Asters from their dark bed –  
How long we have all been dead;  
Soon the black sun will appear.

The small red fish in the pond;  
A brow that must listen, and fears;  
At the window the evening wind whirrs and roars,  
A blue organ-droning sound.

Star and secret brightness  
Draw our gaze upward again.  
The mother appears amid terror and pain;  
Black marionettes in the darkness.

## Anif

Remembrance: the sea gulls gliding over the darkened  
heaven

Of male despondency.

You dwell in silence in the shadows of the autumn ash,  
Immersed in the just measure of the hill.

Always you travel down the green river  
When the evening has come;  
Sounding love; peacefully the dark prey is met –

The rose man. Drunk with a bluish scent  
Your brow touches the dying leaves  
And thinks the stern face of the mother;  
O, how it all sinks down into darkness.

The sober rooms and strict, the ancient means  
Of the fathers;  
This shatters the heart of the stranger.  
O, you signs and stars.

The guilt of those born is heavy. And O, the golden  
shudders

Of death,  
As the soul dreams of cooler blossoms.

And always the night bird cries in bare branches  
Over the steps of the moon-like one;  
An icy wind sounds against the walls of the village.

## The Gleaners

The night is its own time  
And has its own perfections, its own ways.

To the east the hills are nearly black,  
A flow of silhouettes against the deep night sky.  
A few stars are shining at the edges of the hills.

Everything soon will be part of the September night.

The gleaners come out slowly from the dark,  
Moving with less disturbance of the quiet  
Than the faintest night breeze rattling  
A dry corn blade, or stirring the tall grass –

Late gleaners moving silently from row to row,  
Pausing, stooping, rising, moving on....

Embers of light in the ragged stubble of the corn.  
Shadows of the severed stalks in moonlight.

The gleaners make no scuff marks in the furrowed dirt  
As black a charcoal or in the moonlight lit a silver ash.  
The strewn and yellow corn leaves take no impress from  
bare soles,  
Are merely shuffled vaguely, as though by a slight breeze.

I stand very still at the edge of the field trying to feel what  
is happening –

From the infinite well of the darkness  
Voices and footsteps moving and speaking, whispering,  
From the infinite well of past time

The silences speaking out of the many who are gone,  
The emptiness gathering with the slow dance of the earliest  
gatherers.

Slowly the sleepers who are no longer asleep join hands in  
the circle of the moon,  
Silent, the lost who are no longer lost touch hands in the  
midst of the field,  
Sing in the silence of the autumn night –

Hands that are corn blades, arms that are broken stalks,  
Voices that are wind moving softly in the mown field,  
Feet that are roots from so deep in the earth and yet  
moving,  
Moving and stepping, turning and circling,  
Circling and turning, stepping and moving.

From the crease between substance and shadow,  
Through the doors in the twilight so lately just opened,

The gleaners have come forth, moving silently  
from row to row.

## Childhood

The elder bush laden with fruit; quietly childhood dwelled  
In its blue hollow. Over forgotten paths  
Where now the wild grass turning brown shushes and  
The silent boughs listen; the toss and rustle of leaves

As when the blue water sounds in the rocks.  
Soft is the cry of the blackbird. In silence  
A shepherd follows the sun which rolls from the  
autumn hill.

In blueness for a moment is only more soul.  
Timid, at wood's edge, a deer shows itself,  
And peaceful the old bells and the dark villages rest in the  
ground.

More pious, you know what the dark years have meant,  
Cold and the autumn in lonely rooms;  
And shining footsteps ring forth in the holy blue.

An open window creaks softly; the sight  
Of the ruined graveyard on the hill moves you to tears,  
The memory of legends told; yet still the soul brightens,  
When it thinks of people glad, the darkly gold  
days of spring.

## **To the Boy Elis**

Elis, when in the dark wood the blackbird calls,  
This is your down-going.  
Your lips drink the cool of the blue rock spring.

Let go, when your brow bleeds softly –  
The ancient legends,  
The dark meaning of the flight of birds.

Yet you go with soft steps into the night,  
The night that is hung with purple grapes,  
And you move your arms more beautifully in the blue.

A thorn bush sings  
Where your moonlight eyes have been.  
Oh Elis, how long you have been dead.

Your body is a hyacinth  
In which a monk dips his waxen fingers.  
Our silence is a black hole

Out of which, from time to time, a gentle creature will step  
And then slowly lower its heavy eyelids.  
A black dew drips onto your temples,

The final gold of decaying stars.

## Evening Song

In the evening as we walk along the dark paths  
Our faded forms appear in front of us.

And when we're thirsty  
We drink the white waters of the pond,  
The sweetness of our troubled childhood.

Dead, we rest under the elder bush,  
And watch the grey sea gulls.

The clouds of spring mount up over the dark city,  
Which keeps its silence about the nobler days of the monks.

When I took hold of your two slender hands  
You opened your wide eyes softly;  
But that was long ago.

Yet when the soul is visited by a darker harmony,  
You appear, the white one, in your friend's  
autumnal landscape.

## Helian

In the solitary hours of the soul  
How beautiful it is to walk in the sun  
And along the yellow walls of the summer.  
Our steps are light and faint in the grass; and yet  
The son of Pan still sleeps in the grey marble.

At evening on the terrace we got drunk on the brown wine;  
The blushed peach is glimpsed in the leaves;  
Soft sonata, and cheerful laughter.

Beautiful now the silence of the night.  
Out on the dark plain  
We meet up with shepherds, and there are white stars.

When the autumn has come  
A sober clarity appears in the grove.  
Quieted we wander along the red walls  
And our open eyes follow the flight of a bird.  
At evening the clear water recedes in the cemetery urns.

The sky is joyous in the bare branches.  
In his pure hands the country man brings bread and wine.  
Fruits ripen peacefully in the sun-filled room.

How solemn is the visage of the beloved dead.  
Yet the soul is made glad in its proper observance.

Powerful is the silence of the devastated garden,  
There where the young novice takes brown leaves to  
wreath around his brow;  
His breath drinks the icy gold.

His hands touch the age of the bluish waters  
Or, in the cold night, the white cheeks of the sisters.

Soft and harmonious is the walk down through the friendly  
rooms,  
Where there is loneliness and the rustling of the maples,  
There where perhaps the thrush will still sing.

The human is beautiful, appearing thus in the darkness;  
Astonished, wondering, you move your arms and legs,  
And your eyes turn silently in their crimson sockets.

At evening, toward Vespers, the stranger is lost in the black  
of November's destruction.  
Under the moldy branches, and along the leprous walls,  
Where the saintly brother before him  
Went absorbed in the gentle music of his insanity.

O how lonely the evening wind when it ends,  
And the dying head dips down in the darkness of the  
olive trees.

Shattering is the decline of generations.  
In this hour the watcher's eyes  
Are filled with the gold of his stars.

A glockenspiel sinks in the evening, it will sing no more;  
The black walls along the square are down,  
And the dead soldier calls us to prayer.

A black angel  
Leads the son into the empty house of his fathers.

The sisters have gone far away to the white-haired old men.  
The sleeper found them at night under the pillars in the  
hallway,

Returning from sorrowful pilgrimage.

O how stiff their hair is with filth and with worms,  
As he stands in the midst of it with silver feet,  
And each one dead steps forth from bare rooms.

O you psalms in the fiery midnight rains,  
As the servants struck their soft eyes with nettles,  
The child-like fruits of the elderberry  
Bend dumbfounded over the empty grave.

Now the yellowed moons turn softly  
Over the fever linen of the youth,  
Before the silence of the winter follows.

A sublime fate, as though musing, descends from  
the Kidron  
Where the cedar, a gentle thing,  
Spreads itself beneath the blue brows of the father.

A shepherd leads his flock over the meadow at night,  
Or there are cries in sleep,  
When an angel, brazen, approaches a human being  
in the grove.  
The flesh of the holy one melts on the burning grate.

Purple grapes twine around the clay huts,  
The ringing bundles of the yellowed grain,  
The humming of the bees, and the flight of cranes.  
The resurrected meet at evening on the rocky paths.

The lepers are mirrored in the black waters  
Or they open their garments bespattered with filth  
Crying in the wind with its balsam scent, which blows from  
the rose-colored hill.

Slender girls grope about at night through the alleys,  
Trying to see if they find the loving shepherd.  
On Saturdays the gentle song sounds in the huts.

May the song remember the boy as well,  
His madness, his white brows, his departure,  
And the corrupted who opens his bluish eyes.  
O how sorrowful is this meeting-again.

The steps of insanity in the black chambers,  
The shadows of the aged under the open door,  
As Helian's soul sees itself in the rose mirror  
And snow and leprosy fall from his brow.

All along the walls the stars have gone out  
And the white shapes of light.

The bones of the graves rise up from the carpet,  
The silence of the crosses fallen down on the hill,  
The sweetness of incense in the purple night wind.

O you broken up eyes in black mouths,  
As the grandson in the soft eclipse of his reason  
Meditates on the dark end alone,  
And the silent god lowers his blue eyelids over him.

## De Profundis

There is stubble field. The hacked corn blades and tatters.

There is an old tar-paper shack.  
The windowpane is a plastic sheet  
Nailed to bare boards of sill,  
Gray boards the color of an old wash rag.

The plastic hangs at one corner  
And snaps in the wind.

An orange-rusted oil drum, the kind I used to burn trash in,  
Stands crumbling on itself in the yard.  
There is chicory, tall grass, brown dried-up milkweed.

The wind whines and makes a sound like corduroy being  
rubbed very fast.  
It hisses and sings and keens, it whirrs and the whirr,  
from time to time,  
Becomes a whistle – urgent –  
Like a kettle nearing its boil,  
Then it sinks down and grows quiet.

In the wind  
The dim grass in the twilight  
And the dry and corroded milkweed pods  
And the blackened withered tall chicory  
Waver and stir.

The pasture is full of rocks and rises beyond  
To a barbed wire ridge.

The evening is growing dim. all around the landscape is  
empty.

Blue shadows darken the pasture.

A young body might have been found here once,  
As though fallen from the sky, at an early point of creation.

What has become of it?

Full night and the black rain falls.  
Bare branches are full of portents and signs;  
They ripple and toss as though,  
Somehow, to shake themselves free.

Here and now  
The cold water drips through his forehead.  
The coal of the sunset is no longer held in his hand.  
The spiders that spun the web of his nerves  
Are clots of brown dust.

Yet again, in the morning, the steel knives of the frost  
Will carve the water's light-crystal.

## Landscape

September evening: the shepherd's dark cry rings out sadly  
Through the village at twilight; fire spurts in the  
blacksmith's forge.  
Violently a black horse rears up; the virgin's hyacinth locks  
Snatch at the ardor of its crimson nostrils.  
At the edge of the woods the doe's cry goes numb,  
And the yellow flowers of autumn  
Bend, without speech, over the blue face of the pond.  
A tree that burned down in red flames; the bats flap up  
with dark faces.

## My Heart Toward Evening

At evening you hear the shrill cry of the bats.  
Two black horses run in the meadow.  
The red maple rustles.  
The traveller glimpses the small inn by the road.  
Wonderful: the taste of new wine and chestnuts.  
Wonderful: to stagger drunken through the twilight wood.  
Painful the bells sound through black branches.  
The dew drips down onto your face.

## Autumn in the Old Town

In the autumn fields at the edge of town  
The garden plots are yellowing and ragged, gold and  
rust-eaten,  
Tanning in the evening light.  
But vegetables are still on the vines,  
And the last of them now are taken in.

The evening gardeners crouch and kneel in the sunset.  
Sunlight flashes from a straw hat's brim  
Or glares from the windshield of a truck.

Curling and orange-spotted leaves fall from the bean vines  
Parchment-yellow leaves drop slowly from the drying  
stems,  
Rakes and hoes are piled in a corner near the shed  
With canvas gloves and grey spools of twine.

The fields beyond roll away in all directions –  
In the sunset's light,  
The stilled and outstretching breakers of grass  
Are amber and reddish brown.  
Black tire tracks breakoff in empty side lots,  
Dark green trees crowd the ochre hills in the distance.

I walk along silently,  
My steps are soft in the cool grass,  
And gratefully I breathe in the cool evening air,  
The musty dry scent of the garden, the acrid wood smoke,  
The scent of ground warmed by the sunny days  
And cooled by chill nights.

The breeze is cool and gets colder,  
And sails of the flocking cumuli  
Catch the sunset –

Mauve clouds and pink, luminous yellow-bronze,  
Blue tints on the glowing white gypsum, and the late sun  
Colors the fields  
Copper and dimly burning orange-gold.

Where is the path when there is none?

In the gold streams of the sunset  
Over the twilight of the copper-green fields my shadow  
steps out  
Far ahead of me – beaming across,  
From the dark furrow to the grass in the ditch.

At the edge of the field the wild apple trees  
Catch the wind and light in their branches.  
Their shadows on the grass are a wire cage in the  
slanting light,  
The grass's gold deepens to amber until it fades, receding to  
a dense floating gray.

I hear the last bird cries calling before the sunset  
stills them.

Then a raked-over bed of coals  
Burns in the far crack of the hills.  
Slowly the black shapes of the trees  
Are the trees themselves, but darker.

The world grows more remote and continues without me.

## Evening Wind

The wind is in the eaves as night arrives,  
Blowing in with the darkness of evening  
Across the spaces of the dusk,  
Across the ruined lot, with brown bits of leaves like paper  
And stray paper like dead leaves.

And as it does it cries across the evening,  
And with the faintest sound that cannot not be heard –  
Of merely the wind underneath the eaves and under doors.  
Crying in the empty spaces of itself.

This is the sound of nightfall –  
A chilling wind, just as the last of the winter sun  
Is fading in the trees – steep shadows  
Across the houses and the street.

There are, and there will be, no stars tonight, no moon.

The sound of the wind across the dusk of being  
Is like the nightfall coming on, pervasive, definite,  
A shadow slowly lengthening within.

In this we find a knowledge of ourselves,  
When the violet dusk across a winter lot  
Is a barrenness, an emptiness, seeming to be all.

## On the Way

In the evening they carried the stranger to the morgue;  
The scent of tar; a light rustling of the red sycamores.  
The dark flight of the jackdaws; in the square a sentry  
paces back and forth.  
The sun has set in black linen; over and over this lost  
evening returns.  
In the next room the sister plays a sonata by Schubert.  
Her smile sinks very softly in the decrepit fountain  
Which murmurs blue in the twilight. O, how old is  
our lineage.  
Someone is whispering down in the garden; someone has  
departed from this black heaven.  
The scent of apples comes from the cupboard.  
Grandmother lights the golden candles.

O how mild the autumn is. Softly our steps sound in the  
ancient park  
Beneath the tall trees. O how stern, the violet countenance  
of the twilight.  
The blue spring at your feet, secret the red silence  
of your mouth,  
Overshadowed in the slumber of leaves and the dark gold  
of the withered sunflowers.  
Your eyelids are heavy with poppy and dream softly  
against my brow.  
Soft bells thrill through my chest. Your countenance  
Is a blue cloud sunken around me in the twilight.

A song for the guitar, which sounds in a strange tavern,  
The wild elderberry bushes there, a November  
day long ago,  
Familiar steps on the twilight stairs, the sight of brown  
rafters,  
An open window in which a sweet hope has remained.  
Inexpressible is all, O Lord, that brings us shuddering to  
our knees.

O how dark the night is. A crimson flame  
Has gone out in my mouth. In the silence,  
The lonely string-music of the anxious soul expires.

So, when drunk on wine, you let your head sink down into  
the gutter.

## Psalm

There is a light which the wind has blown out.  
There is a country tavern which a drunk man leaves in the  
afternoon.  
There is a vineyard, burnt and black with holes that are full  
of spiders.  
There is a room that has been white-washed all with milk.  
Now the insane one is dead.  
There is an island in the south seas  
Ready to receive the sun-god. The drums are sounding,  
The men are putting on war-like dances,  
And the women sway their hips in looping vines and fire  
blossoms  
While the sea is singing. O our lost paradise.

The nymphs are departed from the golden woods.  
And now one buries the stranger. A light rain begins.  
The son of Pan appears in the form of a laborer  
Who had slept through mid-day on the burning pavement.  
There are small girls in a courtyard in dresses of  
heartbreaking poverty.  
There are rooms filled with chords and sonatas.  
There are shadows which embrace before a blind mirror.  
At the hospital window the convalescents warm  
themselves.  
A white steamer carries the blood pestilence up the canal.  
  
The strange sister appears once again in someone's  
nightmare.  
Resting in the hazel bush she plays with his destiny.

The student, a double perhaps, watches her a long time  
from the window.  
His dead brother is standing behind him, or else he  
descends the old spiral staircase.  
The form of the young novice goes pale in the dark of the  
brown chestnut trees.  
The garden at evening. In the cloister the bats flit about.

The caretaker's children leave off from their play and  
search for the gold of heaven.  
The final chords of a quartet. The little blind girl runs  
shivering through the alley.  
And later her shadow climbs up the cold wall covered with  
old tales and with holy legends.  
There is an empty boat; it makes its way down the black  
canal at evening.

In the dimness of the old asylum human ruins fall to decay.  
The dead orphans lie by the walls of the garden.  
From gray rooms an angel with filth-spattered wings  
comes forth.

Worms drop from his yellowed eyelids.  
The church square is dark now and silent, as in the days of  
childhood.

Earlier lives flow past on silver soles,  
And the shadows of the damned descend to the sighing  
waters.

In his grave the white magician plays with his serpents.

Silent, God's golden eyes are opened over the place of  
skulls.

## Springtime of the Soul

O

utery in sleep: the wind storms down  
through black streets;  
The blue of spring – a glance between breaking branches,  
Violet night dew, and the stars through  
the whole sky go out.  
The river darkening in green twilight; silver the old  
alleyways  
And the towers of the city. O gentle drunkenness  
On the floating raft, and the dark call of the blackbird  
In the gardens of childhood. Pink blossoms already burn.

Waters rush freely and murmur. Then the damp shade of  
the river-meadow,  
The animal's step; greenness, greening and  
blossoming boughs  
Touch the forehead of crystal; shimmering and rocking raft.  
Soft the sun chimes in the rose clouds on the hill.  
The great silence and the stillness of the firs; hushed  
somer the river's shadows.

Purity! Purity! Where are the terrifying ways of death now,  
The grey stone-like silence, the precipice of the night,  
And the restless shadows? Radiant sun-abyss.

Sister, when I found you in the solitary clearing  
In the woods and it was midday, and then the silence  
of the beast;  
White under the wild oak; the thorn blossomed silver.

Then the overpowering death, the singing  
flame in the heart.

Dark waters flow around the glittering play of the fish.  
The hour of desolation; the silent gaze of the sun.  
For the soul is a stranger on the earth. Blue and  
unearthly dusk  
Over the roughly-hewn forest and a dark bell  
Rings slowly in the far-off village, and long; peaceful  
watch and abiding.  
The myrtle blooms silent over the white lids of the dead.  
The water rings softly in the late afternoon.  
The green of the forest is darker now on the banks;  
joy in the rose wind.  
The quiet song of the brother on the evening hill.

## A Season

The veins of the autumn leaves.

The tatter of cloud at sunset. the black edge of the trees  
against the late sun looking like the burnt-off edge  
of the world.

The different look of the black silhouette of the trees along  
the hill at sunrise.

The softness of the needle bed underfoot when you walk in  
the woods. Magnificent, to run through the woods  
in early autumn after a rain.

How beautiful, to run half drunken through the woods in  
October when the leaves are gold.

Wonderful, to sit by the fire on an evening in November.

Magnificent, to wander through the maple woods at sunset  
in the autumn with the cold rain falling through the  
leaves onto your face and the sunset burns low  
beyond the cindered hill far off.

Wonderful, to go out for a walk in the evening when the  
fall has come again.

## **The Rats**

Autumn night. White moon. An old farmhouse.  
Fantastic shadows fall from the eaves.  
Broken windows, empty panes, rats' nests of leaves.  
And then the rats dart out, swarming, set loose –

They flit and scurry, with whistling and squeaks,  
All over the yard and a gray mist follows  
Those pouring from the outhouse whose silhouette looks  
Strange in the blue-green moonlight, like a gallows.

And greedily they squeal and fight like mad,  
Filling the whole barn and the empty house –  
And in the barn's more grain than they've ever had.  
An icy wind whines hollowly through the darkness.

## **To the Lake in the Evening**

Leaf-silence and rain drip –  
Leaf-breath, tiny movements held in,  
The woods holding quiet and still,  
Unfolding after a rain.

The air's scent is cool on my skin.  
I breathe the damp taste of earth. I shiver,  
And my scrotum contracts  
With the chill.

There is dampness and growing dark  
At the edge of the trees,  
Then the yellow, mercurochrome  
Bars of the sunset

Fall slanting downward through leaves  
Afloat in the streams of dust-glare  
That choir through the still twilight woods;  
Magnetized particles spin.

In the forest of yellow light-smoke,  
In radiant quivers the strands of light  
Smolder through forms, streaming onward;  
Golden floss adrift, burning,

Then the sunset's blood clot of light  
Erupts through the silence. It sounds  
From beneath the charred outline of hills,  
Shaking and shaking the world.

Then gradually, quickly, the light  
Becomes silent with sun down.  
Through the unsettled agitation of leaves  
The breeze rises, then stops,  
Reawakens, subsides.

The night is the darkness now,  
Here and now. The dark falls and falls  
Through itself in the tense  
Striations. What is expected?

The night is a network of points –  
Of points falling and falling  
And falling – points of time  
Where space rushes to enter,

Points of space out of which time is blaring,  
A burning annunciation, a fire,  
A drumming from far down below  
Like the pounding of blood in my ear.

Over the dark planes of space,  
Through the ripples of time, drunk  
With the poppy of deep recollection,  
I, listening, move outward to witness –

Over the lustrous oil of the starry night pond,  
Adrift over the face of the moon,  
Hearing the lunar voice of the sister,  
The loved one, the lost and her children.

## Summer

Tonight the cuckoo's cry  
Falls silent in the woods.  
The grain bends deeper down,  
The red poppy too.

A black thunder cloud  
Threatens the far hill.  
The cricket's ancient call  
Dies in the field.

Leaves of the chestnut tree  
No longer stir.  
-- Rustling of your dress  
On the spiral stair.

A candle shines silent  
In the darkened room;  
A silvery hand  
To put it out.

Wind-silent, starless night.

## Sebastian Dreaming

# I

Mother carried the little child in the white moon  
In the shadow of the walnut tree, the ancient elder berry,  
Drunk with the juice of poppies, the thrush's lament;  
Silently  
In compassion a bearded visage bent down over her.

Soft, in the darkness of the window; the ancient household  
Of the fathers  
Lay in ruin; love and autumnal dreaming.

Therefore dark the day of the year, dismal, sad childhood.  
When softly the boy descended to cool waters, and the  
silvery fish,  
Quiet and countenance;  
When stonily he threw himself before the raging stallions  
His star in the gray night appeared on high.

Or when holding onto his mother's freezing hand  
He went at evening through Saint Peter's autumn  
graveyard,  
A frail corpse lay silent in the darkness of his room  
And opened its cold eyelids above him.

And yet he was a small bird amid bare branches.  
The bells long in the evening-November.  
The father's silence  
When he descended the twilit winding stairs in his sleep.

## II

Peace of the soul. The lonely winter evening.  
The dark forms of the shepherds, there on the old pond.  
The little child in the hut of straw, O how softly  
Its countenance sank down into black fever.  
Holy night.

Or when, at the hard hand of the father,  
Silently he went up the dark mount of Calvary  
And in the twilight fissures of the rocks  
The blue form of the human passed through his legends.  
Crimson the blood ran out of the wound below the heart.  
O how softly the cross rose up in his dark soul.

Love; when in black corners the snow melted,  
A bluish breeze was caught brightly in the old elder bush,  
In the shadowy arches of the nut tree,  
And softly a rose angel appeared to the boy.

Joy, when in chill rooms an evening sonata sounded;  
In the brown rafters  
A blue moth crept from its silver cocoon.

O the nearness of death. In the stone wall  
A yellow head bent down, silent the child,  
Since in the month of March the moon decayed.

### III

Rose colored Easter bells in the grave yard vault of  
the night

And the silvery voices of the stars;  
In shudders a dark insanity fell from the brow of  
the sleeper.

O how silent the way along the blue river,  
Thinking of forgotten things, when in the green boughs  
A thrush called a strangeness into the sunset.

Or when holding the old man's bony hand  
In the evening he went along the city's decaying wall,  
And bearing a crimson child in his black cloak;  
In the shadows of the walnut tree the spirit of evil appeared.

Groping over the green steps of summer. O how soft  
The garden decayed in the brown silence of the autumn,  
Sweet scent and sadness of the old elderberry tree,  
When in Sebastian's shadow the silvery voice  
of the angel died out.

## To One Who Died Young

O the black angel, who stepped softly from  
the inside of the tree,  
When we played quietly together in the evening  
At the edge of the bluish well.  
Soft was our step, eyes wide in the brown coolness  
of the autumn,  
O the violet sweetness of the stars.

But this one descended the stone steps of the Monchsberg,  
A blue smile on his countenance and strangely cocooned  
In his stiller, silent childhood, and died;  
In the garden there remained the silver countenance  
of the friend,  
Listening in the leaves or in the ancient stone.

Soul sang of death, the green decay of the body,  
And it was the rustling of the woods,  
The deer's ardent crying.  
Again and again from the twilit towers the blue bells  
of the evening rang.

An hour came, he saw the shadows in the crimson sun,  
The shadows of corruption in bare branches;  
At evening, when near the twilit walls the blackbird sang,  
Silent the spirit of one who died young shone in the room.

O the blood that runs from the singing throat,  
Blue flower; and the fiery tears  
Wept into the night.

Golden cloud and time. In a lonely room  
How often you summon the dead to visit,  
And you wander in close speech under the elms  
and down the green river.

## **Crossing the Field at Night**

The field is hard and rutted,  
Cobbled with the mud raised up in rain ruts  
And now frozen, dried and brown.  
The grass bent low frost wet and browned by winter  
And twisted up in cowlicks by the wind.  
Wind that now is blowing strongly from the north – the sky  
Not yet the dark of total night.

A little green light lingering near the ridge  
Fading up to the cobalt blue of night.  
Above, a few dispersed clear stars.

You come upon the old house from the field,  
The chimney smoke in the dark blue of the late dusk,  
Rising and then filming to off to the south.  
The cold star-figured sky.

Alone. No snow yet, feet cold numb in boots.  
Breath rises steaming with every step.  
Night is windy cold.

The leafless tree stands there by the road,  
Branches swaying in the wind.

A few brown leaves are blown across the grass,  
Scattered out before you on the path,  
The last light now nearly faded from the ridge.

## **SANDFIGURES**

### **A Hill**

Up ahead

In copper light  
Against sunset

Telephone poles  
Charred looking

Burnt in gold light  
Yellow and green

Illusory fire  
On a single hill

Black sticks  
Spiky light streaming

Black wires  
Lead talking to talking

As silently as thought  
The air is crowded

With unheard speech

## Early in the Morning

Spectral

I move in dawn-glitter

Flashing mercurochrome sun  
Just above black roof tops

Adrift  
Like a fish in gold light

So intense almost liquid  
The summer sunrise

In half obscurity  
Of eerie light

Less substantial now almost  
Unbodied, half-bodied

My head lacking sleep  
Like a bag full of hay

My shadow more steady  
In the dry grass than my steps

I become  
Only half what I am

Yet more a shape now  
Not a body, filled

With unearthly light  
Behind me

My shadow is set  
On a ripple of gold

My shadow that reaches out  
So far ahead

## One September

In the earliest light  
I move past quiet houses

Through streets nearly empty  
Very still, my footsteps

Quite loud in the cool morning air  
My shadow slips over white clapboard

Over the burnt red of brick  
And the slate-grey of macadam

I enter the tall grass near school  
The grass is wet with many clear frost beads

My shadow, which had trailed at my side  
Shifts around to the front

Flashing out  
Like a search light ahead of me

Distended from a blob at my feet  
It tilts out sharply and long

Like a spike  
Or a dagger

Or perhaps like a nail  
The last splinter of night

A pathway of night  
I can never step out of

But which in the lengthening day  
Will shorten and then be drawn into me

Knowing, not knowing  
I absorb it we will grow

Unavoidably one  
In the copper light

Of the morning  
A cool morning one September

My long shadow ripples and steps  
Across the green field

## July Afternoon, Walking

The sunlight's on my face  
on my forehead and eyelids

And in my eyes

I feel it on my arms –  
it burns down on my shoulder,

on my neck

And on my hands

My face feels baked and dried out, like cracked earth

Yet as I walk I seem to breathe light in

In the warm sun, what is happening to my skin?

The sunlight is a wave,  
is many waves –

A million every instant, each echoing to infinity

Or it is like a sea —

Light flows, no particle of being but that is bathed in it

Or perhaps it is a thought  
imparted

In this moment of clarity and aspiration

Suddenly

I feel my body is nothing  
and is my very form itself –

Shaped by my moving through these burning forms,  
shaped by this light

Instant by instant, silently,  
yet with the weight of suns

Life and the world change in me as I walk

## **Sleeping with the Moon**

In the autumn night, cool  
And fragrant, windy and  
Leaves snapping and tattering from the trees,  
We lie together in your bed.  
The white moon burning in the branches outside.  
Porcelain moonshine  
Filling the white and gathered curtains at your window.

The curtain of your heavy tresses,  
Of your long brown hair,  
Is all around my eyes –  
(Tresses an old word, but the only one).

Your hair is streaming all around my face,  
Touching at my forehead, eyebrows, cheek.  
On the wall,  
The shadow of your curving back.  
Your face a shadow over mine,  
Very close.

Hidden in the streaming of your hair,  
As in the leaf-strewn streamings of the moon,  
Are the gathering nights –  
Winter, spring, summer, fall,  
Turning you night by night,  
Effacing me,  
Unbinding, scattering –

You. Me.

You and me.

## **Invocation**

What could you lack? Rooted in dignity,  
Sensitive, beautiful and passionate,  
Your heart, your mind and body undivided  
Have pursued their one truth, following all threads.  
Concerning the Queen of Angels and of Silence  
I have pondered many nights and many hours...

Concerning the Queen of Silence.

## **Spirit**

Call me to that hour of your solitude  
When all the night is silent  
And the time has come  
To give the rags of your illusions  
To the past,  
Your life no longer something to be loved  
Or to be hated  
But to be

Call me to that hour and I will come

### **Staying up quite late...**

Staying up quite late  
To see what thoughts  
Might cross my mind –

The night ticks slowly.

Like a stethoscope  
The waiting silent room reveals  
The slightest pulse of naked hope  
That lives within the beating mind  
But which the day somehow conceals.

The eye is baffled nearly blind  
Which tries to look inside itself.

Tomorrow I will wake and rise  
And try to see with nearly hopeful eyes.

**The moon is full tonight – the trees...**

The moon is full tonight – the trees  
Not leaved yet in the early spring  
Provide a wicker basketing  
Or brambly partial canopies.

The clouds pour by in tatters, flakes,  
Or broader edge-lit islands.  
Sometimes the moon is cauled with gauzy streaks,  
And sometimes there it stands –

Amid the flowing wind, calcium-white.  
I walk and watch it – silver shoes  
Amid the watery stars and deep night-blues,  
Changing itself, part of the moving night.

## Desk Thoughts

The wind is strong, the cold March rain  
Is blurry on the window pane.  
And though it's nearly winter-cold  
I'd rather be alive out there  
Than stifled cluttered up in here:  
This constant study makes me old.

What have you written and what read?  
I feel a pressure in my head  
That makes me want to get away  
From all entanglements of speech  
And neither read nor write nor teach  
But actually to live each day.

I read somewhere Zen masters say  
You should resolve to live each day  
As though a fire were in your hair.  
But flashing eyes and hair of flame  
Cannot but seem a little tame  
When they are words, mouthfuls of air.

## The Fountain

You are so beautiful, now stay  
With me a while. No, do not move –  
Here where the fountain's misty day,  
At midnight, makes its bright alcove.  
This circle where the water falls,  
Is where the two of us must be,  
For just this moment, while it tells  
My love to you and yours to me.

The water breaks into a shower  
    Of a thousand sprays,  
And in the moonlit hour  
    As it leaps and plays  
    To fall on marble stairs  
Will fall and die into a rain of tears.

Sound of its falling fills the dark.  
Our love is like the water there  
That reaching in its golden arc  
Into the misty midnight air,  
Must drop down like a moonlit rain,  
Or like the passing memory  
Of what can never be again,  
Mine lost in you, and yours in me.

The water breaks into a shower  
    Of a thousand sprays,  
And in the moonlit hour  
    As it leaps and plays  
    To fall on marble stairs  
Will fall and die into a rain of tears.

Its light makes you so beautiful,  
As you draw near so briefly now.  
Now listen to the fountain fill  
The night, that's empty still somehow.  
The sky, the water, a brief wind  
That shivers the white poplar trees  
Are things we cannot leave behind  
But keep within two memories.

The water breaks into a shower  
    Of a thousand sprays,  
And in the moonlit hour  
    As it leaps and plays  
    To fall on marble stairs  
Will fall and die into a rain of tears.

(after Baudelaire)

## Half an Hour

We never slept together; probably  
We never will. We talked  
In the amber dimness of the bar a while, sitting  
In a booth; the two of us were drinking,  
You were smoking too as usual,  
And gradually, ever so slowly  
You moved a little closer,  
Or maybe it was I  
Who moved,  
Just to be a little bit nearer to you.  
It really is a pity  
That we never did,  
And you know I won't deny  
That it's you I've always loved.  
But people who are like us, artists,  
Sometimes we,  
By going far – very far, so far –  
Into the fury and confusion  
Of our creativity  
Create a kind of pleasure and perhaps a joy  
That borders on the physical.  
So, being with you yesterday,  
Albeit with the help of alcohol  
And its mysterious possession,  
I had a half an hour – yes, just thirty minutes –  
That were ecstatic, wonderful,  
Irrational, and also beautifully erotic,  
And I think you knew  
And stayed a little longer with me there  
Because of it. I was so glad of that

And grateful too, since then  
With all my ardor and imagined love,  
Under the spell of darkness, music, smoke, and  
alcohol,  
I had to see your face across from mine,  
I had to see your lips,  
I had to have you near.

(after Cavafy)

## Mists and Rain

O end of autumn, winter, muddy spring,  
Dark times of sleep, I love it when you bring  
Your smoky rain and mist and fog like cloud  
To wrap me in a dark diffusive shroud.

Over that windy and deserted plain,  
Where through the night the creaking weathervane  
Revolves, my soul extends its wings and cries  
Its exultation to the drizzling skies.

For one accustomed to the frost and sleet,  
Whose heart is half dead, nothing is more sweet  
Than having your cold darkness always near,

O deadly seasons, sovereigns of our year,  
-- Except perhaps to quiet my distress  
With one both elegant and dangerous.

(after Baudelaire)

## Evening, an Hour

What do we have but this one moment now?  
The evening closing in accustomed grace,  
The tea that fills our cups, so clear and warm,  
As evening's light floods in upon us here.  
The light is too a warmth, your presence here,  
Likewise, is something that I know and feel  
Diffused throughout my being like a warmth,  
A grace of that which welcomes and accepts.  
The rightness of this hour poised for us  
Is something that we shall not always have;  
Come closer then, speaking softly to me now  
And let me speak to you as though we were  
Not separate but we two now simply one –  
One ecstasy, one silence, one peace

## **Walking through the Old Town**

One afternoon walking downtown,  
About to cross the old Conklin Street bridge,  
I pass the concrete wall marked with red,  
Orange, and blue swirls of spray paint,  
With twisting ribbons, scarves and drizzling plumes.  
In one corner a dripping spatter  
Of crimson runs down.

Stopping for a second I see  
Zeros, X's, infinity loops,  
Arrows, a cartoon-like face, a bull's eye –  
The hex signs of the others,  
Those the unknown and yet familiar.

Their crude speech is flung there –  
Blaring and silent, without syntax,  
Almost wordless,  
Spoken by no one to no one,  
In this particular spot,  
At this one tallied notch in historical time.

Half in the shadow of the wall  
Are two or three benches – forest green, wooden,  
With rusty black arms of wrought iron  
And vine-ornamented legs.

Ten yards to the left  
Is the disused bridge, unsafe now for years  
And closed to all traffic.  
Rust patches stain the girders and rivets  
The red of dried blood.

Look up: through the iron web  
Of arches, cables and spars –  
The blue and exalted North Country sky.

Who here remembers the fires  
That cindered the world  
And threatened – perilously, briefly –  
To change it?

Here everything is what it is and will be.

The Susquehanna flows under the bridge.  
My form is vaguely reflected  
In the green shine of the water  
Amid magnesium flares, bright webs  
And flickering spokes.

On the water downstream  
The wind brings out gooseflesh of silver  
And wind-bruises of steel blue.  
Closer, where the sun strikes it,  
The blue water crinkles, shimmers and sparks.

## September Night, Bright Moon

Wandering the city streets  
At night, beneath  
A chalk-white moon  
That shines and shines and pours  
Its light through open windows  
Onto beds and dressers, chairs  
With clothes draped over them,  
Along the wooden floors  
Of empty rooms, on sleepers,  
Men and women, old and young,  
Those now little suspecting  
To be so silently, mysteriously visited,  
I walk the autumn night and feel  
The shining light, the  
Strangeness of it all and think  
That these, the loved  
And unloved, the wealthy  
And the poor – all  
Must sleep tonight, lie lightly touched  
With ash of moonlight,  
Its dim unearthly silver blue.

The buildings float now  
Weightless, without place,  
Unmoored against  
The deep black of the sky.  
I walk the ashen streets  
And see the moonlight  
World that quivers

In the trembling of an eye.  
Those wakeful shut their eyes  
And sleep at last.  
Quite soon the wood-sequestered owl  
Will shut its eyes,  
The world turn back  
To face the sun,  
The insubstantial  
Become substance once again.

## **A Day at the End of Winter**

Wednesday of ashes, and the graying snow  
Reveals an ashen tint at twilight.  
And in the partial frustration of sight  
There is no promise or purpose of thaw.

Yet even winter darkness has its light  
Compared to that which one can only know  
Beyond worldly grief or natural sorrow –  
A sorrow of mind which cannot be made right.

Disease in time – what is the timely cure?  
One thing is certain: he's no longer here  
Who imperceptibly has gone elsewhere,

Who suffered his own gradual erasure.  
We ask what's left, after such contagion,  
To offer to the watery spring sun.

## **In the Garden at Evening**

O that I might arrive where jubilation  
Of earthly time is felt through every breeze,  
Such clear and yet obscure austere charities  
That touch the soul deeper than any sense.

What must I do for this? The diligence  
Of ear and eye, a human realm, a grace  
Received, then lost; the body and its peace:  
With these there is no innate reluctance.

Yet in the long deferral of that Word  
That will not come, that must never come,  
How great the loss? Still it must go unheard,

Though in some way it must be felt, become  
The fallen, long-obscured, yet human word –  
Though bound within, still finding its freedom.

## Sandfigures

### I

To start again take up the old thread  
a braiding rope darkness  
mystery of charmed association holding  
the rope of sand  
follow haphazard opening

### II

One thing another moving  
purity and compromised illusion  
take note of things  
puddles after the rain a potent fascination  
my face reflected  
small depth  
the puddle an inch deep clear  
gazing into blue sky  
sky mud bright clouds far near  
the surface trembling face pieces streaked with light

sky sun   sun water eye

through that face I  
saw the floor of leaves   cigar-brown

amber water

loam-like mud

times later and I knew auguries

the rain and wind and clouds

### III

Rectangular   burning   luminous

the window was a presence  
made of light

made out of sun

dusty rays   bright reflecting pane

illuminated curtains blown inward  
now and then

These are the elements of ancient memory

in what sense was it I  
who   watching the light  
across the carpet  
or burning in the window's space

The light is like a call the eye must heed  
it wakens and  
the air is active alive  
cannot stop watching once it starts  
though unencumbered sight at first  
gradually discerns  
a form beyond the window  
the radiant figure  
some shape beyond the glass  
hidden deeply in the light  
dust motes floating there

At night the house is silent  
hear the crack of floorboards  
the pipe or faucet drip  
listen hear the unaccounted-for  
movement of the night  
  
footsteps of other times  
  
I made no sound but slipped from bed  
dressed in the moonlight  
and went out

The field was full of wet tall grass

the wind is blowing and the grass hisses and the  
leaves are a kind of surf

sound that's in your ears when there is no other

stars moved around

then stopped  
moved again slowly

And I was on my back How did I fall?

The wind is keeping what I'm looking for

empty space is keeping part of it  
and part is in the ground

I listen closely for the steps of other times  
moving through the ground

## V

Morning light come back

before was Night and Sleep

particles of  
Being loosened  
shaken loose

gradually  
one falls into sleep

deeper intimate remote  
economy

images acts thought  
dim world of self  
passageways  
embers

deep calm of breath now deeper slow

newly known unbeing apparent void

Night a scattering sowing so many worlds

stars selves

At morning light awakens one awakens with it

drawn back to the single the known

identity  
the returning day

## VI

That morning    went out to the back yard  
grass still white    misty with frost  
                     slippery underfoot  
damp sneakers

plums were rotted on the grass  
the garden a tangle of frost-burnt vines crisping  
yellow khaki green

grandfather's best wine barrels  
were left out to catch the rain

and now full of rain water

leaves floating in them

wells of sky

forsythia-yellow and rose-madder leaves  
streaks of apple-green and little brown holes

some floated on the surface      others at a depth

my face among them  
somewhere

## VII

A face

looked back floating

not close not far a face

the sky clouds leaves passing through  
over it  
below beyond

Close eyes press them tight to block  
all the present light

memory  
lean down far deeper in that well

the smell of  
damp wood in my nose the sound of water

echoing around my head

and my face might touch the surface  
cold  
water on nose and lips

## VIII

Noon    the sun was hot and bright

I lay there watching    seeing    eyes closed  
   seeing with my skin

   manifold and immanent intelligence of the skin

I knew the sun around me    I felt its light

   ambient unfocused sensitivity  
   in brain and nerve and bone

The sun is

warmth and light suffuse one's total form  
   every element of being changes

   in accordance with the  
   presence of this light

   mind  
assimilated to this energy

   energy to this mind

## IX

Light comes from within also

as from without here

calm is deep activity, activity calm  
and  
breathing movement thought feeling  
the confluence of realms

of modes  
of self complex dimension of body  
time and world

of feeling  
thought

## X

Memory   begin again   take up the thread

I walk out in the field near the dormitory

it's late one night, the wind is cool

it is the autumn or the spring

tall grass brown and stiff, it must be autumn  
therefore

the smell is from the marshy drainage ditch  
that runs along the road nearby the playing field

the willow tree blows hoarfrost-coated  
in the dark

the scent is strong of something from the moist ground  
green buds on the white birch trees have just come out

had come out to the stand of white birch with their  
peeling and black-banded bark

the early April breeze blows  
through the branches of the birch trees  
where I've come

The white bark of the white birch in the darkness  
is like memory in darkness

## XI

[illegible]

## XII

Sand-ribs and corrugations eddies small swift  
whirlpools of sand and larger waves

streaming particles of light  
the blaze of space and quanta of the day

the falling storm  
of time incinerating time

dust of burnt-out moments  
pouring in the hourglass

time's tide and minute errancies

erasures and  
bright points of sand lost worlds  
of sand

you cannot hold them back

the light pours through your hand

pours down your arm

and through your heart  
current shivering through  
every nerve and muscle

your open mouth fills up with sand

without raising any shout

you're buried silently

And when night comes    what are you then  
a mere idea    but forgotten?

### XIII

The snow falling for hours – outside the storm had  
subsided, the wind had died, snow fell straight down  
growing slowly deeper, the ground white

the basement room – a corner of the cellar:  
chair and table, work bench, tools, magazines  
a coffee cup cast a shadow across the paper towel  
spread like a placemat

The house was dark    silent    floorboards    doorjambs  
creaked    snapped – drafts of furnace-warmth

one lamp on the table – its shade, once bright,  
now yellow, stained, over the top edge  
he could glimpse the white glare of the bulb

when he stood, his shadow would beam across  
the opposite wall, quiver to huge size

had been reading    but now an effort to stay awake,  
with a start he caught himself nodding

the basement window – the snow had made  
dark patterns    islands on a map

the blood pulsing in his head  
how long had it been winter?

long time

on the damp concrete wall a millipede

Rose and paced – paused before the workbench,  
a photograph was taped up on the wooden doorframe,  
was brown dim curling

thought of the house where they had lived  
her in the garden the sun shining on her white  
apron with the red roses on it

noontime and the silent field, the warm scent  
from the opened ground,  
the tall grass that tapped against his hand

#### **XIV**

Alive in time this being evolving form

The  
sand alive in time abiding  
unstable dissipating all figures

and sand marks  
like the sea

sudden gust blows and sifts about  
handfuls frittering away at ridges

and inscribed outlines  
which leak away gradually  
become others

You can blow the grains from your hand

but you cannot  
blow the beach itself from the shore

Wind blows on every particle  
wind blown upon  
what can't be moved by wind only

## XV

That one who committed suicide at twenty-five

think what a long time it would have taken  
to grind him down

You move among these others

who look on  
later you stand too upon the ledge

Look down

the up-turned faces watching you  
are yours and if you step back in

the mirror of the window  
shows your face

half-transparent with everything  
reflected in its glassy surfaces  
a soap bubble

one who committed suicide at twenty-five

## XVI

My breath keeps moving slightly    though the stars  
cannot remain in place

fall constantly along my arm  
it's heavy    tingles to touch  
the air

the grass has gotten cold    it is the night

stars are the signs of night  
dew against my shoulder blade

night has geometries  
they alter as I touch them  
when I close my eyes the night will be  
much simpler

when my skull and ribcage are left  
the field mouse to the cricket  
the night will be much simpler

## Road Trip

A bus ride to Connecticut and then a train trip down into  
New York City, a slow passage across the ice-  
bound landscape, through the sun glare of a winter  
day

And in the course of this I become aware of how the routes  
we take are nothing more than rough incisions in  
the land

Through the window of the bus, and then the train, I saw  
the white trails of jets in the winter sky, as though it  
too were being traced and retraced by webblings of  
silver, by cuttings, by inscriptions

It was early in the morning when we left the town, and the  
windows of houses opposite glowed blue in a dim  
light

there was a light blue snow, and ice-scars in the frozen  
street reflected gold streaks of sun

There were yellow and amber-red street lights, here and  
there, seen from the back seat of the cab

The chimney of one house across from the bus station was  
a black rectangle against the yellow-green sky,  
violet and magenta wisps of steam spooling out of it  
and drifting

It is ten minutes to seven now, the snow is duller, a less  
intense polar blue, the sky brighter, more white in  
the yellow, a bit less green

We're late and now just getting under way: bare maple  
trees, black capillary networks, branching against  
the gray sky now turning a bit more white

The first person I've seen out on the street – a man of about  
forty, in a brown overcoat, walking quickly along  
the sidewalk  
across the street a three-story lilac-grey house now has its  
own color standing clear:  
white moldings around the windows are visible, and white  
triangles of snow on porch roofs, and a plume-like  
shape of snow along the joining where the front  
roof and side roof meet  
there are white scaling and dustings of snow along the fish-  
scales of shingled roofs

It's as if the air has taken on light inside itself, a light  
diffused inside of it, as opposed to being a medium  
through which light merely passes  
and now the paper I'm writing on reflects this: before, I was  
feeling my way to shape letters, words, like  
someone feeling their way along a wall in darkness,  
but now I can see to write  
Where before space had been a complex of receding  
spaces, now the world declares itself with a new  
light raying out from a point below the horizon,  
filling space and filling the air  
The world becomes a sphere, an inverted bowl, a water  
bead, a drop of luminous ice-water

Now it is 7:35, and now the highway. Towns. A factory,  
sun flares orange in its small square windows,  
making them gold tiles  
Already the boredom of a long-distance bus ride. Bring me  
my bow of burning gold.

On the expressway to Hartford: a low broad stretch of  
highway lined with small shrubs  
sun spurting through bare tree-tops that look like brambles,

low, modern office buildings placed far off in the  
midst of empty fields, always glass-paneled, light-  
reflecting lozenges, rectangles, squares, flaring with  
morning sun

Up ahead in the distance, in orange slanted light, are spools  
and billows of smoke from the chimneys and stacks  
of small factories:

bluish at the center, massing cumuli of steam and smoke  
with turquoise and green tints at their peripheral  
cirrus wisps

Eight o'clock: the sun is bright orange at telephone pole  
level, traffic quite heavy – Saabs, Subarus, Mazdas,  
small trucks, vans, at an average speed of 65 mph  
one woman, as she passes us, sips coffee from a  
styrofoam cup, she's about 45, pretty, coffee cup  
held casually in her delicate, small-knuckled hand,  
she looks perfectly relaxed and smiles to herself  
I wonder what she is thinking of, hoping for, as she passes  
out of view

A factory up ahead, like a concrete lozenge, has huge  
phosphorous billows above it, like opals in the  
morning light  
the orange sun-glare blinds me in one eye, squinting down I  
see the tilted shadow of my hand across orange-  
tinted paper

An 18-wheeler, MS Carrier from Memphis, passes three  
feet from my right shoulder, at about 70 mph –  
vibrating, going under a concrete overpass –  
rhythmic flashing, flashing, of morning sun through  
dark and cavern-like abutments

Now the low skyline of Hartford, CT – insurance capital of  
the United States; if something unexpected happens,  
there might be help, or not

One huge billow of smoke in the distance, radiant and  
white-haloed against the sun, ice-blue at the center,  
it looks like a huge snow-drift floating in the sky

And now: the Amtrack out of Hartford, and it is standing  
room only. I stand in the aisle – brown muddy  
carpet, train tracks jolt like very very bad road,  
can't write at all, too much vibration

One factory backside – another, another, on the way out of  
Hartford, and warehouses – Blue Boy Trucking,  
Sutter Holder, Hitchcock Printing, some really bad  
rattling as I write this

But sun on our left that comes through the unwashed  
windows: cloudy streaks and translucent spotty  
veils of dried sleet, patterns like an unwashed  
blackboard, buckshot spatters of dark brown, and  
sunlight coming straight through in yellow and  
copper, like rusty tap water, but with bright points  
of red and gold

Faster now, and a different vibrating, a whirring – white-  
gray tree-blur, then a clump of small houses and  
condominiums, gray snow fields, whitewashed  
billboards with blue-green bubble letters

A flatter area now, and it is 9:20; a few trees scattered, with  
small ponds, rectangles of snow, thatches of brown  
grass the color of walnut shells amid vague outlines  
of glaucous grey frozen pools, and then suddenly a  
snowed-over culvert

We stop. Out the window red stag horn sumac, maple

saplings, ragged dimly yellow forsythia at the edge  
of a marsh, all framed in the streaked, bespattered  
window, itself rimmed with a silver steel frame

Beyond, there are small lots and houses, and we start again  
-- the train gathers momentum:

If you cannot see ahead but only to the side, you have a  
different impression of speed, of mobility: the  
landscape is a scattered intention, broken at  
intervals by houses, factories, lots, fields; you go  
past it, but since the view ahead is blocked by a wall  
(the front of the car which looks like the back of a  
TV set or a black box), the sense of actually moving  
through the landscape is somehow suppressed: the  
motion is less directed, because less coordinated  
with forward vision – one feels more passive, less  
purposeful, more spectator-like, and spectral. You  
are not going toward the world, it is going past you.

So bored, and so quickly it would seem. But why? The  
windows are small and low, like the openings in a  
bunker, and, though luminous, quite filthy. The one  
I'm looking out of is spotted and spattered with grey  
flecks of mud and dirt and smeared streaks of dried  
sleet-muck; here and there, a few long continuous  
streaks, like jet contrail streaks in the sky, but of a  
gray-brown colored drizzle from the upper left to  
the lower right hand corner, the whole thing  
punctuated a-rhythmically with abstract  
expressionist splatterings of dirt, mud bits, and dirt  
crumbs of a puce color, with some amber radiant fly  
specks

We are stopping again. Beyond the window, there's a red  
brick wall, the back of a factory

Now we're moving again. Repeated jostlings and jarrings,  
faster now, and faster still, and now we're really  
flying: the windows show a blur, the landscape  
won't quite focus. "Ok, that takes care of all  
Connecticut," a woman says to a small boy studying  
a map. "That's not an iceberg, right? That's a  
glacier. That's on the land."

Rhythmic jarring, as though one were inside a popcorn  
popper.

In morning light, the smoke stacks of low factories are a  
sandy ochre color  
A row of old-fashioned two-story houses with porches on  
both top and bottom – slate gray, powder blue,  
pewter  
Clumpy epaulets of snow on roofs, shrubbery, on fire  
hydrants. Vibrations felt through the floor.  
Gallagher Bros. A concrete chute of some sort. The  
red wall of a factory's back, the color of Chinese  
lacquer.

Bright day. Winter light. Clear bright air. Sky winter-cold  
ice blue. White cirrus wisps. Mare's tails.  
A yellow coppery tint to the light through the windows  
behind me. Looking at the guy across in the next  
row. Moving fast now. Heather-colored and gray  
blur of trees rushing past the window.

The horn several times – warning, insistent, declarative:  
OUT OF THE WAY! MONEY, MONEY. TIME IS  
MONEY. Actually it sounds like No brakes No  
brakes

Now standing still in the New Haven station. A man  
masked with Wallace Stevens' face is slipping a  
ball-point pen into his shirt pocket. Florid  
complexion. Grimly thoughtful. Looking out the  
window.

A woman near me in black leotards. Nice legs. Thick long  
red hair with brown in it, black band to hold it in  
place

Lots of smokers in the car; cigarette smoke drifting in cold  
yellow winter morning light

For a moment we begin to move backward: a sickening  
feeling momentarily, like going down in an elevator

Outside, men in egg yolk yellow hard hats inspect the train  
wheels; a man with an orange day-glow vest over  
his brown work jacket, white hard hat on, walkie-  
talkie in one hand, strolls jauntily past the window,  
almost a sort of jive walk (a white guy too)

Some sort of machinery parked on the next track over,  
looks like it's used to clear snow off the tracks –  
orange yellow color that snow ploughs always have:  
Metro North Commuter Railroad in black along  
one side

Past ten thirty and we're still in New Haven

On our way again, finally, and moving out of Stamford,  
Connecticut: marinas ice-bound, shadows of trees  
flash over the car

Shrubbery standing with a luminous clearness in  
yellow-tinted light. Leaves fallen. The copper color.

The afternoon colors now: copper-beige, red-browns, off-  
whites, greys, the water in a ditch is grey-green with  
an encrusted, cloudy lace of ice along the edges

Looking around the car now, as though I allow myself to  
look at people more:

one man with a pink Irish baby face, slicked back  
hair neatly parted, yellow button-down shirt, black  
pullover sweater, small shallowly set eyes and dark  
but abbreviated slanted eyebrows; he sleeps with his  
mouth slightly open right up against the window,  
his head pillowed on a red-checked hunting jacket  
two beautiful girls in front seat a few rows away, twins, in  
black leotards, their hair chestnut brown and  
gathered into pony tails, wonderful figures  
a young man near me with beautiful blond hair streaked  
with copper light and tiny motes and wisps spinning  
in the light through the windows, his hair long and  
shoulder-length, lustrous, honey-blond, gallant-  
looking, tied in a neat pony tail at the back of his  
neck with a slim yellow band of some kind  
tiny wisps and stray ends of his hair are caught in the cross  
radiance of the sun through the mud-spattered  
windows, like hay dust and seeds floating in the  
heavy air of late summer

The slightly erotic bonhomie and dreamy unselfconscious  
gladness when looking around or walking up and  
down the length of the car – the fact of self-  
consciousness itself as a type of erotic regard and  
self-regard

An on-going process of exchange and covert recognition in  
a glance, in a word, in being careful not to tread on  
someone else's feet when you walk up and down the  
aisles and the train jostles you. We are together and  
yet not.

A sense of community hovers in the air, diminishes, hovers  
compromised at a hundred points, reconfirmed at a  
hundred others. Until the train pulls into a station  
and people disembark, disperse. Yet we seem to

continually take on more people, and yet we are already full.

There is a sense of disappointment when the train pulls into a station. Why?

Everyone has a very small area around him or her which joins them to the others. It is easy to break, like the strands of a spider web. It is profoundly foreign to us all.

And yet the privacy of the car. A small room. The gleam of panes of glass. Reflected light reflected. It is a Dutch still life. Hurling down steel rails at 70 mph. Gathering tension. I acknowledge myself, the fact of it – this place and time. And then again myself – a self. Responsive tension increasing slowly and then faster. A deep breath, and then an opening, a sudden lightening of mood.

Now we are approaching some tenements, but at tree-top level, as though we were flying, now just above them – an auto body shop with junk littered on the roof, a large rusty yellow sign the size of a bus Auto Body Shop, a sand lot, a cement works, heavy construction equipment lined up – cranes, earth movers, rollers -- factory back sides with graffiti in red white and blue spray-painted bubble letters – strangely, nothing obscene, just flamboyant, self-advertising, vaguely patriotic, the mute speech of the others flung there in acrylic loops and spatters on the back wall of a factory declaiming to the vacant lot, the highway, the elevated Amtrack route

The United States is the true unknown country, a thin crust ready to crack or to dissolve, a strange not yet interpreted place, in which everyone is a stranger

Suddenly it is evening in the car – yellow gas-lit  
atmosphere – we're passing through a tunnel  
Outside the windows one sees sudden absolutely solid  
velvet black, broken here and there with dim  
steel-brown streaks – Pennsylvania Station, New  
York City

More than half the passengers disembark. The train is left  
nearly empty – strangely melancholy, like a high  
school gym after a dance, the fairgrounds after the  
fair is over, the remains of a party

I make pleasant exchanges with a few people as they leave  
or smile briefly at some. They all disappear into the  
catacombs of the station. New people come on,  
boarding in the darkness and amber lamp-glow of  
the underground station

In the seat up from mine, near the window, is a middle-  
aged Black woman. Her hair is arranged in a neat  
bun – very precise; it looks almost lacquered. She  
has a cream-colored scarf around her head and  
through the middle of her hair. She has gold ear,  
rings, a cream and black polka dot scarf around her  
neck; her jacket is expensive looking – delicate  
floral designs done in subdued browns, creams,  
beiges and pea greens on a black ground. She's  
eating a corned beef sandwich on a sesame bun. It's  
a thick sandwich, and she needs two hands to deal  
with it.

Not quite one o'clock, Still at Penn Station. But at a  
quarter after one – daylight again – going past a  
reed marsh outside New York City, an iced-over  
swamp, blue and white crinkle ice, reed stalks light

brown and sand colored, their heads themselves  
darker brown

Railway lines gleaming with sparks and oily shimmers of  
light, caged-in high voltage power company lines,  
more brick walls, 55-gallon drums, themselves as  
black as oil, stacked in rows

Newark, New Jersey. Gray terminal: lighter, the metal  
posts painted a cream color, the paint chipped,  
curdled-looking, over the rough metal, but not  
peeling, sandy gray concrete station floor

The Black woman takes the other half of her corned beef  
sandwich out of an envelope of tin foil. She has a  
brown barrette and various pins through the bun in  
her hair holding it precisely in place and shape.  
Placards on the walls of the station advertising  
airlines, whiskey, the Public Library.

Leaving the station – a car lot, Hundreds of Deals  
surrounded by a cyclone fence, each car has a neon-  
green number the size of a man's chest scrawled on  
the windshield – I pass through the United States,  
but I am not part of it Hamilton's Auto Deals

Spying on The Wall Street Journal over a commuter's  
shoulder. Editorial: Man of the Decade? Man of the  
Century? "He may have been full of quotes and  
stories, but he was deadly serious about his goals.  
Mr. Reagan was the most consistently effective  
President since..." The commuter is sandy blond –  
smooth, soft neatly combed hair balding at the  
crown. Tortoise shell glasses. A mustache with  
auburn in it. A navy blue suit. A gold band on his  
left hand, a watch on that wrist. A slim neck, loose

in his collar with sandy freckles at the back near the  
hair line. Narrow shoulders yet large hands

In the brighter light the encrusted grime on the windows is  
less apparent – one looks through it and not at it: yet  
the dirt is still there – the major streaks and  
splotches look like the precise cuts in a frosted glass  
relief, yet these are irregular, a strictly chaotic  
Or they might be roads seen from high above by means of  
aerial photography – lines in the landscape itself  
which are the landscape itself or which have  
become it;

But these are literal traces of the land – of dirt – on what  
might be a lens through which one looks amazed,  
horrified, to see – what?

Sun-glare of a winter day. The country is crossed and re-  
crossed with paths and trails and turnpikes, roads,  
railroads, highways, laced with the contrails of jet  
planes, webbings and bright networks, weavings of  
light and electronic memory, and yet all no more  
than an ice crystal or a smear of mud with the sun  
shining through it

And it was as if I closed my eyes for a moment only to  
descend into the catacomb darkness of Port  
Authority

Then resurrected from this underworld, we draw slowly  
down the ice bound eastern seaboard – the streets of  
Baltimore now flashing by, laid out in strict rows  
beneath a radiant winter sun, in a light that brings  
with it – just now – a sudden and startling clarity

And before long I step out onto the streets of the  
strange city, the city of strangers, the fated and  
devastating city, Washington, carrying a suitcase,  
looking for a cab

The day is still clear and cold, with the same pale blue  
winter sky, empty, strangely abstract, tatters of  
white cloud pushed along in a sharp breeze  
A recent snowfall has left patches of dirty and packed-  
down snow; under foot there are half-melted  
puddles with crusts of brittle gray ice like  
fragments of smoky glass

In front of the embassies on Massachusetts Avenue the  
lawns were a dull green and mustard yellow with  
scars of brown mud  
I decided to take a walk up Massachusetts Avenue,  
"embassy row" as it is sometimes called  
I stand at the corner waiting for the light, doormen bustling  
about, hailing cabs and reassuring patrons  
Glancing down I notice the dirty crumbled ice in the  
gutter; near the street it is grimy looking, like some  
kind of charred residue

Since Congress is not in session, the traffic is relatively  
light and one has the feeling of having a major city  
almost to oneself. Yet there is something unsettling  
about this, as though one were wandering around in  
some monumental structure that has grown too  
large for the human presence which occupies it  
The embassies flow past like the spaces on a game board.  
Outside the embassy of the Cote d'Ivoire a tall  
Black man is unhitching a bicycle from a post in the  
front yard

Some of the embassies are modest town houses with  
stairs leading up directly from the street; they have  
an informal and lived-in look, with people coming  
and going; others are more stately and remote.

The South Korean embassy is slate gray, heavy and squat, a  
small fortress. Two fashionable young women in  
furs are framed briefly in the green glass of its foyer  
Then there is the embassy of Bolivia. Next comes the  
Japanese embassy, a low structure recessed behind  
high steel gates and a tall spiky fence. Rows of  
ornamental trees are planted on both sides of its  
central drive

I come to a traffic circle: Sheridan on horseback with  
traffic swirling around him

To the left the British embassy sprawls, an ugly modern  
office complex. It looks like a hospital

A little way beyond that is the residence of the Vice-  
President, sometimes called the "little White  
House." A patrol car is parked sideways before the  
black iron gates of the Vice-Presidential grounds

I cross a bridge – the water below is grey-green with  
borders of white ice near the shore, flat chunks of  
gray ice float downstream in a slow current

The day has grown slowly more overcast, a vague remote  
winter sun

After a lot of wandering, I come to what is called the  
National Mall – a big field – and wander up and  
down the walkways which define it

There are museums scattered throughout this part of the  
city, and there are several exhibits going on, but I  
don't feel like looking at pictures. The crowds are  
surprisingly large, seeming to flow in a current of  
their own

Eventually one ends up at what is called the Viet Nam  
War Memorial

The low clouds are the color of cigarette ash, and by this  
time there is a cold smoky rain

The brown and yellow grass is streaked with mud which  
is the color of wet hay, translucent cauls of  
melting ice make a kind of fragmented window  
pane across it

At the entrance to the visitors' walkway, a homeless man,  
wearing a sign saying he's a veteran, stands with a  
styrofoam coffee cup held out, begging and  
shivering in the icy rain

The path which leads down to the Memorial is made of  
tar-black paving stones, very precisely set and  
spaced, each one the length of a man's boot

They form a sort of public road which lead down into a  
pit, a wedge or chevron, which had been excavated  
so that its top was level with the ground

In this way, the wall appears as a sort of sheer cliff face  
made of black granite, as black as onyx and so  
highly polished that it reflects with a total clarity all  
the visitors standing in front of it

Halfway down the path I crouch down to look at the wall  
more closely. Behind my shoulder the other visitors  
are reflected in the wet black stone. The names  
themselves seem rather faint, like dim half-erased  
chalk marks on a blackboard. *Kenneth C. Berrier*  
*Reginald A. Brown Robert C. Burke* I walk on  
further down. The tablets of black stone are well  
above my head. *Robert D. Cicio Billy Joe Cole*  
*William F. Coleman* The surface is full of rain  
drops, and this makes it more difficult to see the  
names. I feel like a tiny insect crawling over the  
page of a dictionary. *Philip T. Lindsay Roland E.*

*Moore Kevin S. Mulgrew* I stand back a ways. The  
ranks of names become a blurred script that flows  
across my beige trench coat, as though across a  
page of old newsprint. When I move closer again,  
they seem to float somewhere between my mirrored  
forehead and the surface of the stone *Bobby C.*  
*Sutherland Kaley A. Somer Larry K. Spangler*

About a hundred yards away from the Memorial, a  
metal statue of three soldiers mark the other  
entrance to the park. I'm not expecting them as I  
exit, but suddenly they're there, hemmed in with  
their own grove of bare trees

Their wrinkled copper-colored uniforms seem  
curdled, their pectorals are exposed by open shirt  
fronts, so that they resemble male models, and they  
seem to slap each other on the back in the rough  
camaraderie of drunks

The visitors themselves are quite ordinary, the usual  
students and tourists. A volunteer, a veteran  
himself, trim and athletic with a gray crew-cut and a  
shiny apple-green track and field jacket dispenses  
information to the curious among the crowd, who  
mill about with their plastic gift shop bags and their  
multi-colored umbrellas

The rain is not stopping, and eventually, some visitors, I  
among them, are moved to take temporary shelter  
under the high pillars of the Lincoln Memorial  
nearby. Standing on the wet steps before the  
enormous statue of Lincoln, looking out across the  
length of empty fields, I can see the rather small  
faint vertical marker of the Washington Memorial  
in the distance, bone-grey and just barely visible  
through the mist and cold rain

## Bridgeport

O Bridgeport burning in  
Pale winter light, your factories  
Once labored to supply  
The capitalist war masters for their wars.

Now rusting, disused, broke,  
You are a cast-off mistress  
Accumulating grievances.  
The ice-pools on your roofs shine in bright winter sun.

Your university, in better days  
Designed to educate ten thousand,  
Now gets just half of that. You wonder why.  
Their union broken down,

The faculty crawl out  
From underneath their sandwich boards  
And file back to take  
Their thirty-three percent pay cuts.

O Bridgeport, as I pass  
Your fenced outlying warehouses  
The yellow gleam of winter light  
Shines on your spools of razor wire.

## Connecticut

Quiet, alone, I lie here on my bed,  
Preoccupied with blank persistent thoughts,  
Not yet asleep, but resting, breathing in the cool night air,  
And listening....  
The tower clock of the Congregational Church nearby  
Strikes loud eleven times.

My window open to the night, reverberations  
Carry through the mild spring air. It's May.  
The scent of rain, of new spring grass,  
And of the many flowering ornamental shrubs –  
The white and pink cherry, scarlet hawthorn,  
Pink dogwood and the ornamental plum –  
Come in upon the sweet and cool night breeze.

For five months now I've walked the foreign streets,  
The strange ground of Connecticut.  
And yet in the United States all ground is strange,  
All places noticed only by the stranger,  
Entirely banal, familiar,  
Lived-on, long-suffered, mapped and zoned;  
All easily disposed of: purchased, sold,  
Made into roads and highways,  
Condominiums, restaurants and shopping malls.  
Sometimes we glimpse a still-green corner,  
Just briefly, from the window of a passing car.

You and I, reader, think how long  
We still must live,  
Must work and live to work  
And drive our cars to work,  
Must travel blind and deaf,  
Autonomous, complete, and free,  
How long we still must go on  
Trying to enjoy our lives, trying to keep on –  
In this unlimited realm, this brisk unfettered world,  
In this abortive, still-expanding order,  
This power-ridden, visible and unacknowledged game,  
The not quite hidden, mystified, and nearly perfect Reich.

## Questions for Saturday

Who owns these houses in a row  
who owns the highway and the street  
who puts it down or pulls it up  
who owns the bus, the commuter train

Who owns the hill and who the land  
the trees the grass the air itself  
who pollutes it, who cleans it up

Who controls you  
who buys and sells you  
who will feed you  
or not feed you

Who owns your car  
what about your house  
who made your car  
who sells you gas

Who owns the doctor when you're sick  
who lets him treat you  
or prevents him  
who decides this, is it you?

Who lets you know what's going on,  
your newspaper or magazine  
who owns them, who controls them?  
who has paid for the televised news  
how do you know the things you do,  
by whose say so?

Go to the mirror in the bathroom  
whose is the face you see?  
where did you get those circled eyes  
your clenched up jaw, that worried brow?  
Is it really you?

Who will clothe you  
or not bother to,  
give you a house  
or put you out?

Who will use you, then discard you  
who will make you sick  
or make you well –  
who has decided all of this?  
Was it you?

## A Workingman Young and Old

### Young

At ten  
Or ten thirty  
I get out of bed.

Drinking last night  
In a room full of smoke,  
Got drunker than shit  
But I almost never puke.

However,  
When morning light breaks through  
And hums like the electric company's wires  
Behind my eyes  
It seems to more or less sever  
Something inside my head.

I fall out of bed.

My head rolls on the floor.  
The window slides upward  
And the door at my feet  
Spills me out into the street.

With my clothes and bed clothes  
I assemble myself  
And go walking the town –  
The dirty, money town.

I have a thirst that won't drown.  
Like any working man.  
A man does what he can  
But in the end it won't do.

A man does what he can,  
But it's never enough,  
For they own the whole town  
And the whole country too,  
And my life and your life.

## **Old**

I get up early  
While it's still almost night,  
And I drink my coffee  
As I watch the first light.

With my lunch box and hard hat  
I drive to the plant;  
I'm an iron filing  
Drawn to the magnet.

My nose is ground  
On that irresistible stone  
What will it be  
By the time they're all done?

All day at the mill,  
All day on the job –  
By the end of the day  
I'm almost ready to drop.

But my car's not paid up  
And my house is the bank's  
And my camper and boat  
And the snowmobile too.

What pulls me ahead  
And what drives me from behind  
Is the money I've spent  
And the money I need.

So I get up early  
While it's still almost night  
And I drink my coffee  
And watch the first light.

## Free Time

The end of every working day  
would find them in the booths  
or leaning with one elbow on the bar  
--talking, smoking, drinking –  
passing the time till closing time.

“Jesus Christ, d’you see that catch!”  
who know how many like it here had been.  
My father tended bar at his father’s place,  
and he said he saw the best of them  
--talking, smoking, drinking.

At ten o’clock on Saturday  
he’d open up and they’d be there,  
drinking Black Label, Genesee, Four Roses...  
--talking smoking drinking:  
“I could give you a whole list of names, and they’re  
all dead –”

Rudd and Schrader, Delaney, Morgan,  
Combs and Swann...”--and they all died before sixty.”  
That was the truest thing he ever said.  
--talking, smoking, drinking:  
that was how they’d spent their free time, after all.

What can one expect? They never learn:  
Beer glass and ashtray, lighter and cigarettes –  
tools of a special trade.  
--talking, smoking, drinking.  
Had they been taught? Or was it just in them?

## **The Prisoner**

Close every light now,  
Let me no longer see  
The ceiling or the floor,  
The walls that number four,  
This room where I must lie,  
This place and time where I must be.

Yet in the darkness, metronomicly,  
Thought follows thought,  
Metronomicly, meticulously,  
The clock ticks out my life.

Day follows night without relief.  
Sorrow tightens in my throat  
Into a knot of grief.

It melts like ice  
Or nearly melts, eventually,  
And leaves a few tears  
Trickling down my face.  
How did I ever come  
To be here in this place?

## Early One Morning

A frozen morning, mid-winter.  
Against the green sky –  
Black chimneys  
And blue-violet chimney smoke.

The roofs of the town  
Are dark shapes – rectangles, dashes,  
Black hulls in the sea of orange light  
Streaming across them.

Here and there, the roof ice  
Glimmers and shines,  
And beneath, as though in the depths,  
The sleepers waking, not waking.

The clouds are islands of shale.  
Then it burns as with spotlights  
Through flocculent bright rifts –  
Molten copper, molten bronzes poured out.

The doors of light open and open.

The town hangs on the edge of its sleep

## Sea Wind, West Wind

West wind now moving in the moving pines,  
Whoever feels you now will think 'the sea.'  
You give the essence of the water to the air

Then give it back to water once again in rain.

This breeze blown inland from the open sea  
Will bring the slight suggestion of salt water not yet rain,  
And bring to mind that place from where it's blown:

From the moving darkness of mid-ocean and midnight,  
Then from the sea of day,  
The morning's blue-green water, the Lydian activity and  
sparkle

As the day grows brighter,  
The whitening sun, the water's pointillist glare,  
Reflection of the midday light  
Upon the pure fluidity of water turned to water turned to  
water once again.

And so I feel this wind, a movement in the moving  
branches --

Just slightly touched at random points,  
Just moved so as to make their shadows imperceptibly  
Shift and alter, to suggest activity,  
Some realm of process hidden or diffused.

And from this recessed stand of trees, breeze-visited  
Yet still, sweet smelling, shadowed, needle-matted,  
cool,  
A vague path overgrown with wild berry vines and grass  
Leads gradually down a slope  
And brings me to the shelf at cliff's edge  
Fronting out to sea.

I stand there looking out.

The sun is straight above, the sky now blue and clear,  
A glare comes off the water, a plane of light  
Beneath me – burning, active and still.  
A glittering abyss of light, fallen  
From the abyss of sun and sky, from where we once had  
come.

The breeze picks up,  
Crazing the sun's reflection on the sea,  
The early, nameless one,  
The water furrowed by the sharp cold wind  
That blows across my face and through my hair.  
I feel it on myself and listen  
To catch nothing but this light and wind,  
-- Things that bring perfection  
To this moment, now and here – as I myself must do,  
Standing at noon to watch the sun upon the breaking floor.

## EROS

### A White Rose Given to Me

Y our white rose now more lovely than it was  
With its green stem that once drank up the rain  
Now takes the rain that's water in my glass  
Where it and my water measured out remain  
As coupled things, both lending each a part  
To a civilized and innocent repose  
Wherein not nature nor too much of art  
Has marred a natural grace where it arose,  
But left it sweet and telling of a love  
Which may be not the blossoming result  
Of stem and rain and dark earth that it's part of,  
But blossoming no less is clearly felt  
As such more truly ours, nor any less  
For being thus in our power to express.

## Alba

A dry summer. Dust blown along the street.  
The shade is breathed in slightly in the wind –  
Dawn with its twilight aching in the mind.  
The light is lilac on the white cotton sheet.

The drapes just parted – a gray fissure burns.  
The eyelids tremor – one sleeps or else pretends:  
Blue glow along the edges of the blinds,  
For some moments we're the hinge on which day turns.

Risen at last, the sun continues higher.  
Across the lawn a small crab-apple tree  
Looks like a Chinese character in the glare.

Awake, you haven't turned to look at me.  
We're like two matches twisted in their fire.  
And yet no fire is like your black hair.

## **Wet Summer Night**

The breeze across our dampened porch  
Brings the scent of basil and of wet  
Black soil across your silhouette;  
It touches, though we do not touch.

One cannot get away – perfume  
Of spearmint and the night-dewed grass  
Will enter deeply and possess  
The cool air of a dark bedroom.

Is this night rain – the leaf's wet tip  
Bent down to touch the leaf below?  
Or is it dew that gathering slow  
Distilled its one depending drop?

It doesn't matter. Either way  
There's all this damp mist in the air.  
Let's let it soak us and not care  
How wet we get before the day.

## **Eros**

I enter you, your legs spread wide,  
My tongue within your mouth, my cock  
Touching you, searching you deep inside.  
You cry and dig your nails in my back.

What do you whisper breathing in my ear?  
That you want me inside you, but not there.  
Poised like a brimming glass I wait,  
Then every drop flows down your throat.

## Her Voice

I always loved that voice the most  
Which came from somewhere deep inside  
Of you. Remember once embracing as  
We stood without our clothes beside your bed?

I stood behind you with one hand  
That touched your small soft breast and one  
The rondure of your stomach, and your skin  
As soft as dusty moth wings, your brown hair

Which caught the amber candle shine –  
Your bedside candle lit, then not.  
And then your breathing, and your voice filled up  
The darkness as a fragrance fills a room,

Everywhere, no one place, always  
Here, here, here, in front of me,  
Around me, all around me, as I pressed  
My forehead and my lips into your hair,

And you your head back against my face,  
So that your opened mouth spoke toward  
The dark above us, as your voice cried out.  
It cried and cried. I keep on hearing it.

## Gacela

A pine scent    pine fragrance in our room  
    limitless sweetness at the heart of night  
        everywhere    nowhere  
always    long ago  
        here    while you sleep, and now  
  
multiplying essences of time  
    this moment, this hour  
        suggestion of depths  
of spaces, times –  
        a sudden opening  
  
these touch the deeply known  
  
        essences    Being in itself  
                yours    mine  
suddenly no thought    no act is needed  
                        only  
        your presence  
  
                somehow here  
                                proclaiming  
  
our darkest solitudes resolved to light  
  
        made one now  
  
and then, later, still passions of your sleep

## Afterward

The room three-quarters dark  
just one dim amber light  
upon the bedside stand

I lie awake  
thinking through questions of the night  
my twilight passages of thought and doubt

sadness  
for the moment  
meditatively distracted

a quiet and temporary peace now

Or just  
wondering

I wonder at your sleeping form  
spirit and body  
now at one in this original stillness  
separateness always available

And at our ritual how old is it?  
of separateness ignored  
on just pretense

It will be long  
before the dawn  
edges the curtains  
with a dim blue gray

before the sun's  
    bright summoning and glare  
        like ground glass sparkling on the blinds  
then with light rays coming  
    through cigarette burn openings

Lie peacefully in sleep

I will lie here too

    waiting and thinking the whole time

[Breathe her name...]

Breathe her name

January air

          how much  
Cold   breath icy  
          perfume  
          aspiration

stream of air  
                  moving quickly past

fire  
      her glance  
          moment freezes   burns

                  brief electric   pain

          cold   dark  
black silk

ecstatic   night

## Ritual Speech I

Once again, the vague parting  
In your dark hair –

Your deep perfume,  
And a silken lubricant

On the tip of my tongue,  
Not a half-remembered word

But you, at the tip  
Of my tongue, you speak

The word I can't recall,  
In every cry, in breath itself

And yet why should I recall it? –  
If this is the ritual

Of merely trying to remember,  
Of again forgetting?

Again and again,  
The word is torn from us both –

From my searching tongue,  
From your ecstatic throat.

## Ritual Speech II

This part of me is like a tongue,  
Moving, speaking inside you

Your opening  
Is like a mouth

That holds this tongue

A mouth open, avid, voluble,  
And a tongue ardent, pointed, searching –

What speech do we bring forth?  
We who can only do so together

## **Gacela**

No one has tasted, or could ever guess  
Your fragrance, black cymbidium perfume.  
No one could know the torment of your whisper,  
The dark rose petal of your fluent tongue,

Your crying tongue, which was a thorn as well  
To enter me, yet entered as a rose,  
Which blossoming through every part broke out  
A thorn again to seek only your hand,

Your body, the elusive garden where  
A thousand petals bury our night's sleep  
Beneath your closed eyelids, behind your lips,  
Between the parting branches of your thighs.

How easily you took my life away.  
I died of hunger and I died of thirst.  
No one has tasted or could ever guess  
What you have given me to drink: perfume,

What you have given me to eat: roses.  
No one could know this, or will ever know,  
This garden of my death and resurrection.  
And since I know, I too must be no one.

## Curriculum Vitae

So many others have been where I am now.  
One night by chance you happened to say this.  
The autumn town. The day is wet and cold.  
The maple leaf is crimson. The oak leaves fall.

Cold rain lashing through the black branches.  
We're lying in your bed. You touch my face.  
And it's a type of knowledge, isn't it, touch?  
According to Aristotle, the most sure.

What do you learn, what do your fingers feel?  
My handsome face, you say. Words sound so strange.  
What do even our two mouths know to say?  
Tell me if you can think of anything.

A storm outside. The bleary rain runs down  
The window's glass in crooked streams and drops.  
A tattered leaf sticks to it now and then.  
Seasons continue. What else can they do?

So many people pass by down on the street.  
The afternoon grows darker. Shadows fill  
The room. Your clothes in the open closet  
Are dim shapes. Ajar, the white door glimmers.

The air is cooler and it feels like night.  
A quiet settles around. Do we both feel it?  
When everything's been offered and been had,  
What have we learned? What will we ever learn?

## **In the Dark**

This candle  
In our darkened room  
White point the darkness  
Moves around

The lighted candle  
Burning near a hand's  
Shadow on the ceiling  
The hand that reaches out

Illuminated now  
A pale petal-orange  
Between the blind's of fingers  
Before the light is gone

The dark is settling now  
With its candle smoke and silence

## A Voice

Only those  
Who know desire  
Know who I am  
Know what I am

Only they  
Can take the step  
To where I am  
In the mirror realm

To what I am my  
Breath of shadows  
And my eyes of  
Shadows shadow eyes

Only those  
Who know desire  
Know my dusty touch  
Like moth wings

Know my mouth  
Like gold eyes gold eyes  
On the green moth's wings  
Like the black moth's eyes themselves

Like the open  
Gashes mouths of tree knots  
Speaking silent  
In the night

Like the blank spots  
In a mirror  
After the mirror  
Has been shattered

Like the jagged bits  
The broken glass  
The eyes the faces there  
In fragments in the empty frame

## **When I rise from the dead...**

When I rise from the dead  
When you rise from the dead  
No stone will be there  
At the door of the tomb

There will be nothing  
And there will be no one,  
When I rise from the dead  
When you rise from the dead

Burning, the shadow  
Of our paper flesh  
And burning the substance we are  
Our shadows the ash

And the dark we become  
It grows longer at evening  
The sun leaks its blood  
It streams around the ash of my life

When I rise from the dead  
When you rise from the dead  
No more ashes to touch  
When the dead walk the earth once again

## The Queen of Heaven

The great inverted crotch of the oak tree  
Is a huge woman upside down.  
Her legs spread wide  
Now draw in all the powers  
Of the rivers of the air, the rain  
And the punishments of rainy wind.

Her head is underneath the earth,  
And from the dark inverted crown  
The ganglia and branches  
Of her hair reach down, reach down  
Dark wrappings, arterial  
And complicated threads,  
Her tingling awakened nerves  
Are opening and stirring,  
Ringing and flushed with wet.

A powerful rain-gust rattles the glass pane,  
It blurs it with a splash,  
It shakes and buffets it.  
Again and again the whole tree flows  
And shudders through the waves of gray rain-mist.  
Its limbs and all its branches  
Surge and sway, bend and then snap back –  
Again and again their heavy toss,  
The sudden shiver as a branch breaks off.

Yet down inside the earth, deep down,  
She opens her mouth wide in pleasure.

**Scent of roses, yellow roses...**

Scent of roses, yellow roses,  
Present in the mirrored room.  
In the mirror, dresser, table,  
Stand inside their pool of moonlight.

Silence, and the moonlight's rain  
Pours in through the open window –  
Yellow moonlight, ivory yellow,  
Unearthly silent night and  
Yellow moonlight full of roses,  
Their fallen petals and their scent  
In the mirrored room's reflection

Here, in the unearthly night.

## Souvenir

The night's completely silent at this hour  
And I've come back from being with you late.  
There's nothing else to do but sleep or wait  
For dawn to come. Outside a late night shower

Is tapping through the branches, on the eaves –  
It sounds like sugar pouring through the leaves.  
Aside from this a perfect stillness reigns  
Just broken by the drops on the window panes.

What can I say? So many thoughts of you  
Who are the one thing in my mind tonight –  
Unquiet thoughts and the remembered sight

Of you in lamplight, both beautiful and true:  
My memory, a trivial souvenir,  
Except that it tells how beautiful you were.

## The Summer Hat

We push aside the lilac at the front yard gate  
And pass along the shaded pathway there;  
Still cool and mild, the almost summer air  
Full of the scent of summer in mid-May.  
What did the motto of that picture you had say?  
(A framed and rather arty photograph  
With mist and wood path haunted by some trees.)  
That magic doors are always recognized too late?  
You're silent, smile, and almost seem to laugh.

We walk and talk. I can't help notice that  
You've worn your favorite summer evening hat,  
A panama with roses in the band,  
Brought off so naturally, an offhand grace  
And emblem of your loveliness and ease  
That shadows and yet compliments your face.  
And as we walk our conversation wanes,  
But in a manner that we understand  
To be a quieter and deeper speech,  
Exchanging solitude instead of talk.

The summer evening slowly turns to dusk  
Around us as we lengthen out our walk  
And cut across the field by your house.  
It's nearly dark, and yet it almost feels  
That night delays a moment just for us.  
You stop and turn, I see your silhouette  
Against the dark, beneath, the grass is wet  
With ground mist and a sweet damp fragrance fills  
The air around us like a scent of musk,  
Or possibly of clover, or of trodden mint.

What could I say? What sort of compliment  
Could be the equal of your presence there?  
Some kind of token that I might present,  
Albeit insubstantial, just some word  
Or words while any of the time remains  
Before our visit's ended and we reach  
Your doorstep. By now it's fully dark, the air  
Has that late feel. We part, and afterward,  
In memory, it seems we might have shared  
Some finer and incomparable speech.

## **A Dream of Jasmine, the Flower of Innocence**

We two lulled drowsing on the lawn at night  
Drift in the night's warm breeze and jasmine scent,  
The breeze that moves within  
And touches softly each jasmine leaf itself  
And brings us just one thought, the thought of one desire  
Already beautifully possessed, and peace itself,  
And love also possessed.

We lie here in repose,  
And petals fall down softly in the midnight air.  
And jasmine fills the night.  
Our hands touch softly, though they seem not to.

The air is just all jasmine,  
All our thoughts and even breathing like it too,  
Whose vines and yellow flowers  
Crowd upward through our dreams,  
And crowd into the dream I dream of you  
And crowd into the dream you dream of me too.

## An Invitation

The after-scent of rain and the wind moving in the trees  
Are like a kind of presence in the warm night air.  
I called on you this evening, and you came away,  
Thinking perhaps to find in me  
The echo of your own solitude.

We pushed aside the lilac at the backyard fence  
And passed through to the path across the field.  
And now we're in your graveyard, as you call it,  
Where you always come,  
Your favorite of all spots,  
And that's the reason that you've led me here.

The two of us pass quietly, stopping here and there.  
Our steps are cushioned silent in the late spring grass,  
And the long loose-fitting dress you wear blows free  
As we pass beneath the oak and poplar trees.

We move without a thought from place to place,  
No longer talking now, just listening.  
And the trees' dark arms, as I think that poet called them,  
Shade in their own completely covert spots  
And make enclosures that are all of deep shadows,  
So that we move from shadow into moonlight  
Into shadow once again.

And in the middle of the cemetery – what?  
A stone facade amid the oak and poplar trees,  
The marble pillars bathed in polar blue by moonlight,  
The full moon shining, silvery and white,  
The moonlight weird, fluorescent...

And the mausoleum simply standing there,  
A kind of temple as we thought, and the trees the sacred  
grove.

And you perhaps a nymph. And I? Ah, yes....

And finally one day when you and I  
Are elsewhere and no longer taking walks  
At night here anymore, we'll come back anyway.  
I'll come back and I'll find you at this spot  
Or you'll return and always find me here.  
Each waiting for the other, it will be  
As though we'd never left – just you and just me.

## **The Stranger**

### **I        The Stranger**

We're naked in the summer night, the air  
In your dark bedroom warm, and yet  
The midnight breeze just stirs and freshens it,  
The fragrant air we both breathe, now and here:  
Now, when you whisper wordlessly in my ear,  
Here, where your sweat is mingled with my sweat,  
Your legs around me clasping me so tight,  
Your mouth pressed into mine, our breath together,  
Your untormented and yet crying voice  
Now carried through the deep night – far, so far –  
Beyond all thought of future or of past,  
Of pleasure or of pain, of chance or choice,  
Of pondered death or sleep or of desire  
For either, of the world possessed or lost.

## II      **Heaven and Earth**

The sky is beautiful tonight, deep blue  
Of hyacinth and cobalt, and the stars  
Are white along the eastern hills. Whispers  
Just audible of evening's breeze that now  
Grows quiet at the very end of day,  
Though still it touches leaf and stem and stirs  
The leafy vines and delicate white flowers.  
Moving between us, all about us too,  
Desire awakening inside of us,  
Though not a good yet bringing us all good,  
Opens forgotten places in the night  
Where laughter flowers from the shaken leaves,  
Where life, the world, and passion are restored  
To what they were and earthly love is sweet.

### **III      Stranger from the dark wood...**

Stranger from the dark wood, how your dark  
Tough nipples were so strange between my teeth,  
And how I felt you whisperingly breathe  
Into my ear 'now say you want to fuck  
Me, that you want me that you want to suck  
My nipples,' as you lay there underneath  
Me, as we strove and struggled and my breath,  
Like yours, came faster as you sucked my cock.  
I took your nipples in my mouth again.  
A fluid – clear, a bit like egg white – came  
From them, from you, to me. I was surprised,  
And you somewhat amused by that. And then  
You held my head in both your arms, eyes closed,  
And I, with my eyes closed, shared in your dream.

#### IV      I've drunk you in...

I've drunk you in, and your dark essences,  
Opening your legs and then the rose –  
Petal by petal, with my tongue, my nose,  
Knowing there, so full, so deep, the sheer presence  
Of your femininity, your open cunt,  
Petal by silken petal, *pli selon pli*.  
You were my lover, and then part of me,  
I part of you, and what more could I want?  
But blessed, cursed, with desire, sane, insane,  
I wanted more, I wanted all of you.  
But where and how and what could be enough?  
-- My cock inside you as though lodged within  
The wasp waist of an hour glass, your life  
Flowing through you, through me, past me, and past you.

**V    The night will come...**

The night will come and it will have your voice,  
Your smoker's voice, felt in your absence  
Like a severed limb. I feel your presence  
Ache in the unsatisfied tormented place  
Where somehow you are still inside of me.  
The two of us were one; I drank you in –  
Your essence all around me and within,  
My aching tongue searching inside of you.  
So I possess you now and always will.  
Yet what could be more empty, more painful  
Than this consuming memory of love –  
Possessing nothing, never to be free  
Of what I need most but can never have,  
Although I did once, and it's still part of me.

## Nude in the Bath: Homage to Pierre Bonnard

*Woman and more than woman,  
                                dreaming, afloat  
In the gold enclosure of rapt time  
Forever timeless yet so warmly clear,*

*What is the gold that falls about your throat?  
What is its radiant origin or name? –  
Touching unearthly light to skin and hair.*

# I

If light creates the most intense desire,  
Is this desire I feel for you? your arm  
Draped fluidly along your outstretched form  
Draped by the water – gold, itself so sheer

As to be your negligent and gold attire.  
You are preserved from all desire and harm:  
The virginal seclusion of pure form,  
Seclusion of divine light and holy fire.

I am excluded from that clarity.  
I shuffle through the sunlit room and stare;  
Light echoes in the dust mote seeded air,

Opens the room with its neutral purity –  
Light touching every corner, every wall,  
So that its world is newly visible.

## II

The same sun glaring on the white sun dial  
Out on the lawn? It seems impossible  
It could so subtly glitter in this still  
Water reflecting the gold and yellow tile,

That there could be such beautiful denial  
Of that which might deny the beautiful,  
And if you ask how easily, she will  
Just very slightly stir or slightly smile.

What is the name and nature of such light?  
More than the eye had seen or mind proposed  
It is enigma veiled in plain sight,

What cannot be forgotten nor possessed.  
You see it still, even with eyes closed,  
What you must have, of which you're dispossessed.

### III

Your body bathed in light moves half submerged  
In water so alit and gold I see  
It more as veil than as transparency,  
Through which your outline has but half emerged,

And see the opal in the water merged  
With sparkling sunlight, delicately  
Webbed and blurred in the intensity  
Of bright reflections, enclosed and yet enlarged

By echoing the whole room's burning space,  
So that the room is one small world of light:  
Amid these glories, you too take your place.

Unhampered radiance obscures the charm  
Of flesh's loveliness. Yet this is light,  
Radiant and pure, creating form on form.

#### IV

Nothing is as beautiful as light  
And even the most beautiful of shapes,  
The form of woman in water that drapes  
Her fluidly with silken insight,

Is no more than an adjunct to this sight  
Of disembodied radiance I glimpse  
Discovered through the female form which keeps  
The sensuous enigma and delight

Of light itself, amid illusive water –  
Gold and opal points in which she lies  
Half dreaming and yet knowingly aware

Of what her office is: to be the form,  
Expressed in paint, of which the substance is  
Without substance, yet radiant and warm.

## V

Is this the origin of light? This place  
The painter's hand has brought forth out of line  
Responsive to itself, and plane to plane,  
Creating the illusion of pure space

Which fixed there floats upon the cloth surface  
And draws the eye, the mind, the hand again  
Into its bright center of relation,  
Thus beckoning the hand to leave its trace?

And if it is the origin of light,  
Why is its not elusive clarity  
Impossible to locate by mere sight,

As one might point a word out in a book? –  
Inevitably elsewhere when I try,  
Yet always present if I merely look.

## VI

A sense of something perfect glimmers where  
The image of her living form has been  
Called forth from pigment, oil, and benzene,  
And made both visible and wholly clear.

Unfailingly attractive, yet austere,  
Bearing a glamour, though perhaps unseen,  
Something I know of yet cannot attain  
And which I nonetheless cannot forswear.

The ringing glass, the crystal, beckons me;  
The air itself is active in the sun  
And changes what I see, and how I see,

Making the painted canvas a clear plane  
Through which an apparitional dimension  
Is seen, stands clear, and then recedes again.

## VII

Bathed in the apparitional bright space  
Of that dimension which you occupy,  
You are the still point sought by soul and eye,  
Their poised and luminous yet active peace.

The painter has achieved unsought-for grace  
Where every line and plane is brilliantly  
Alight with casual intensity,  
Where every point of light has found its place.

You drift and dream within that radiance  
Which fills you, yet of which you cannot know:  
You bear too much of its significance,

An ancient burden too complex to tell  
And too obscure; you bear it lightly though –  
Your form all light and, although empty, full.

## VIII

Her skin, this patina or nacreous shell  
Of paint, crystalline, feminine, delicate,  
Catches the light and then is part of it:  
Pollen yellow, peach tones, mother of pearl –

Planes of the artist's fashioning that fill  
With disembodied grace, and so permit  
Her to be held naked, inviolate:  
Space is transfigured for the smiling girl.

It's turned into a form, a scheme  
Of light and correspondences, illusory,  
A shell of light, darkening with time,

Yet perfect nonetheless and made to keep  
The dreaming figure, though imperfectly,  
From all that would disturb her radiant sleep.

## IX

Splendor in splendor, and quite uncontained –  
Is this the beauty of your living form?  
Like light itself, it never need conform  
To any space nor be at all confined.

Dynamic, still, it radiates beyond  
The limits of the canvas and the frame;  
The painted surface deepens to become  
A realm of spirit, of embodied mind.

You are a source, and yet a witness too –  
To what you seem and yet can never be,  
To what I see and yet can never know.

I witness now your witnessing of light  
And your embodiment of light's beauty,  
Here and now, in my awakened sight.

## X

Breathing and the rhythm of my eye's  
Ecstatic standing-present in the day,  
Searching out, gathering erotically  
And endlessly, are gathered in likewise.

Desiring substance, breath, transparent, sees  
What's hidden, inwardly and palpably;  
The eye, opaque, yet seeking transparency,  
Feels throbbing for its ultimate release.

And now approaching sleep I move to touch  
The springs where light and darkness interflow  
And where the virtual and real match;

Time and the world can't follow where I go,  
Into the springs of breathing and of sight  
From which these poured forth at the touch of light.

## XI

Who could determine every line and point  
Within this overwhelming gold? – the gold  
Of pollen from the flower whose petals fold  
Their space within a flaking skin of paint?

What eye could follow, and then what restraint  
Prevent the hand from reaching in to hold  
The disappearing hand just briefly held  
Within the mind's eye, fleeting and radiant?

Light overflows around me where I stand  
And feel the moment opening beneath  
The moment past, the sand grains of my breath

That rise to suffocate and bury me –  
Now while the poised still movement of her hand  
Touches my eyes allowing me to see.

## XII

As though this body, radiantly here,  
And as it once conceivably had been  
Before its darkened advent or conception,  
Filled with its own light, animate yet clear,

Purified of everything impure,  
Of even last traces of its origin,  
Free of every compromised relation  
And so allowed to stand before me here,

Were now a living body I might touch  
Without embracing, hold impalpably,  
Searching beyond what any hand might reach,

I touch the bright enigma where it lies  
In this capacity to feel and see,  
Albeit with my just awakened eyes.

### XIII

That I awaken now before you, radiant,  
The sun in every corner of your room  
Adding its little to your burning form  
Which surely your perfection could not want,

Suspended in your shower of light aslant  
The wavering tiles' gold and fiery plum  
Which glimmer in their purple-misted gloom  
As sunlight overflows the barred casement –

That I stand here is nothing, everything:  
The splendor is half hidden, yet the eye,  
Here called to witness, and in witnessing

Overwhelmed in its desire for what it sees,  
Wavers: attention half consents to die,  
If only that it might find its release.

## XIV

That I might somehow know that radiance,  
Glimmering, just-imagined, and yet seen,  
If only briefly, where it must have been  
Possessed by sight, if even only once,

A sunny, gold and careless opulence  
Poured out in front of me and held within  
Its formal life of prodigal restriction,  
Its stunning liberation and balance;

That I might touch as well as merely feel,  
That I might know as well as merely touch  
The inconceivable, the illusory

Redemption held before the mind's eye,  
Infinite and uncontainable,  
However much my speech might be too much.

## XV

You have become a part of me somehow.  
Who could describe what happened? Secretly  
New voices opened, speaking inaudibly,  
And drew me into them. Yet this was you.

Merely to see you was itself to know.  
I felt the brimming rapture of the eye.  
The gaze of captivated memory  
Was how I saw and also what I saw.

Yet I was not myself. The floating world,  
Illuminated then, grew fixed and tangible  
And clearer, although more mysterious,

Darkened with shadows that I saw or felt,  
However vaguely, in each syllable  
I spoke and in the world that was and is.

## **To Painting**

That light should hold a light within itself  
And radiance a greater radiance,  
Unfixed within the fixed and active points  
That give the painting its first touch of life,

Untouched by life itself, should be enough  
Perhaps, and gives its satisfactions once.  
The mind is satisfied when freed from chance,  
And yet its longing eye must find relief.

A light within? Yet what, and where, is that?  
Haunting the images of memory?  
Or hidden just beyond the painted light?

If it is painted, where did it come from?  
What is this beauty? What do I really see?  
Where is its origin and final home?

## FOR BACHMANN

### Setting Out

Smoke is rising from the land.  
Keep your eyes on the small fishing huts,  
For the sun will go down  
Before you've put even ten miles behind you.

Dark water now, thousand-eyed,  
Opens its lashes of white foam  
To regard you, opens them wide and long,  
Thirty days long.

And even when the ship stamps down hard  
Taking an uncertain step,  
Stand calmly on deck.

At the tables now there'll be fish,  
The smoked fish;  
The men, kneeling down,  
Will tend to their nets,  
Though at night they will sleep  
For an hour or two;  
Then their hands will grow softer,  
Free of salt and of oil –  
Soft as the bread of dreams,  
The bread that they break.

The first wave of night strikes the shoreline,  
The second one reaches you.  
But then looking beyond it

You can still see the tree  
Holding stubborn its one arm aloft.  
The wind has already broken one down.

And you think: how much longer,  
How much longer  
Can the crooked timber hold out in the weather?  
The land is no more to be seen.  
You should have clawed at the sand bank with one hand  
Or pinned yourself to the cliff with a lock of hair.

Blowing into their shells, the monsters of the sea  
Glide on the backs of waves; they ride with bright sabers  
And strike the days into fragments.  
A red trail is left in the water;  
There where your sleep lays you down  
For the rest of your hours,  
Your senses fading.

Then something's gone wrong with the lines.  
They call you, and you're glad  
To be needed. The best thing of all  
Is the work,  
On ships that fare forward –  
Tying line knots, the bailing,  
Seams to be caulked, keeping watch by the freight;  
The best thing of all, to be tired at evening  
And to fall into bed; the best thing, at morning  
To be bright with the first sun,  
To stand there against the unmovable sky,  
Not to give thought to impassable waters  
But bring the ship forward over the waves,  
Toward the sun-bank that always returns.

### **Shadows Roses Shadows**

Under a strange heaven  
Shadows roses  
Shadows  
On a foreign earth  
Between roses and shadows  
And in the strange water  
My shadow

### **Hotel de la Paix**

The burden of roses drops silent from the walls.  
Floor and ground show through the carpet.  
The lamp's heart of light shatters.  
Darkness now. Footsteps.  
The door has bolted itself against death.

**After this deluge...**

After this deluge  
I would see the dove –  
And nothing but the dove,  
I would see it saved once more.

For I'd go under in this sea  
If it didn't fly away –  
If it didn't bring me back,  
At the final hour, this leaf.

## Advertisement

But where are we going  
don't worry don't worry  
When it grows dark and grows cold  
don't worry  
But  
and with music  
What should we do  
more up-beat, with music  
And what think  
still more up beat  
In the face of an ending  
with music  
And where are we taking  
for the best  
Our questions and the horror of all our years  
to the dream laundry don't worry don't worry  
But what happens  
for the best  
When death's silence  
  
Steps in

## Exile

I am one of the dead and wander  
reported nowhere anymore  
unknown in the world of the prefect  
unneeded in the golden cities  
and in the green countryside

disposed of long ago  
or provided for with nothing

but the wind and with time and sound

I who cannot live with others anymore

I with the German language  
this cloud around me

this language I keep as a house  
pass through all languages

O how it all grows darker  
dark sounds of the rain  
only a little falls

Into brighter regions then it raises the dead

## Songs from an Island

### I

Shadow fruits fall from the walls.  
The house is white-washed in moonlight, and the ashes  
Of craters now cold are carried about on the sea wind.

In the embraces of lovely youths  
The shores themselves are asleep,  
Your flesh is reminded of mine  
And yet it was mine already  
As the ship freed itself from the land  
And the cross of our mortal burden  
Stood watch near the mast.

Now the execution sites are empty.  
They search but they cannot find us

### II

When you rise from the dead  
When I rise from the dead  
There will be no stone at the gate  
There will be no ship on the sea

Tomorrow the casks will roll  
Down toward the Sunday's waves.  
We come on anointed soles  
To the shore. We wash the grapes  
And then tread out the harvest to wine,  
Tomorrow, on the shore.

When you rise from the dead  
When I rise from the dead  
The hangman himself will hang at the gate  
And the hammer will sink into the sea.

### III

Surely the festival must come one day!  
Holy St. Anthony, you who have suffered,  
Holy St. Leo, you who have suffered,  
Holy St. Vitus, you who have suffered.

Make way for our prayers, make way for the worshippers,  
Make way for music and make way for joy!  
For we have learned simplicity,  
We sing in the choirs of the cicadas,  
We eat and we drink.  
The lean cats roam round our table  
Till the evening mass begins,  
I hold you by the hand  
With my eyes,  
And a peaceful and spirited heart  
Offers its wishes to you.

Honey and nuts to the children,  
Full nets to the fishermen,  
And to the gardens fertility –  
And the moon for the volcano, the full moon  
for the volcano.

Our small lights crossed over the border,  
And the rockets made their arcs  
High over the night; on dark rafts  
The procession now draws itself out,

Gives the night to a primitive world –  
To the creeping lizards,  
To the gluttonous plant,  
To the hectic fish,  
To the orgy of winds and the desire  
Of the hills where one pious  
Star wanders lost, strikes against them  
And dwindles to dust.

Now remain steadfast, foolish and holy saints,  
Say to the mainland, the craters do not sleep,  
Holy St. Rocco, you who have suffered,  
And you who have suffered, holy St. Francis.

#### IV

When someone departs he must take  
The hat full of sea shells he had gathered through summer  
And then throw it into the sea,  
Going on with his wind-blown hair,  
The table he had set for his love  
He must throw to the sea  
And the last of the wine in his glass,  
Give his bread to the fish,  
Mix with the sea a drop of his blood,  
Drive his knife deep in the waves  
And let his shoes sink,  
Heart, anchor and cross,  
To go on with his hair blown about in the wind.  
And then one day he'll return.  
When will that be?  
Don't ask.

## V

Under the earth there is a fire  
And the fire is pure.

There is fire under the earth  
And molten rock and stone.

Under the earth there is a torrent  
And it streams into us.

There is a torrent under the earth  
And it scorches every bone.

A great fire will be coming  
To stream over all the earth.

We shall be witnesses.

## Dark Things to Say

I, like Orpheus,  
Play death on life's strings –  
Before earth's beauty itself,  
And your eyes, which order the sky,  
I have yet only dark things to say.

Don't forget that, of a sudden,  
You too, on that morning,  
Your camp still wet with dew,  
The carnation asleep on your heart,  
You saw the dark river  
As it flowed by you.

The lute strings of silence  
Taut in the river of blood –  
I touched your ringing heart.  
Your tresses were changed  
Into night's shadow-hair,  
And the black flakes of darkness  
Turned your visage to snow.

I do not belong to you.  
Now both of us mourn.

But I, too, like Orpheus  
Know of life on the side of death,  
And it still remains blue for me,  
Your eye now closed forever.

## Songs in Flight

### I

Palm branches break with snow  
the stairs are falling in,  
the city lies stiff and gleaming  
in a strange wintry shine.

The children climb and clamber  
up the hunger mountain,  
they eat of the whitest flour,  
their prayers rise toward heaven.

Rich tinsel of the winter,  
the mandarin-like gold  
whirls in the wild flurries.  
The blood orange rolls.

### II

And yet I lie alone  
in hacked ice full of wounds.

Even the snow has not yet  
covered and closed my eyes.

The dead, pressed close to me,  
are silent in all tongues.

No one loves me and  
for me no lamp is hung.

### III

The Sporades, the islands,  
beautiful fragments in the sea  
encircled by cold currents  
yet offer their fruits to me.

White rescuers, the ships,  
-- O lonely sail of a hand! --  
point, before they founder,  
back toward land.

### IV

Cold as never before has broken in.  
Commandos flying came from across the sea.  
The bay has surrendered with all its lights.  
The city has fallen.

I am innocent and captive  
in a Naples overthrown,  
where winter  
holds Posilipo and Vomero against the sky,  
where its white lightning bolts clear away  
among the songs  
and it puts its hoarse thunder  
in charge.

I am innocent, and all the way to Camaldoli  
the pine trees touch the clouds;  
without solace, for the palms  
are seldom stripped by the rain;

without hope, for I shall not escape,  
even when the fish ruffles its fins to guard me  
or when the mist on the winter beach,  
risen up from ever warm surf,  
makes a wall for me,  
or when the waves  
in fleeing  
free the fleeing one  
from his next goal.

## V

Away with the snow from the city of spices!  
The fruited air must blow through every street.  
Scatter the currants around,  
bring the figs and the capers!  
Revive the summer then,  
make the seasons new.  
Birth, blood, filth and excrement,  
Death – cut into the welts,  
the lines overlaid  
upon faces  
mistrustful, lazy, old,  
outlined in chalk and saturated with oil,  
sharp from clever deals,  
well-acquainted with danger,  
with the wrath of the lava god,  
the angel's smoke  
the fire's cursed embers!

## VI

Well-instructed in love  
from ten thousand books,  
wise through the handing-down  
of barely alterable gestures  
and foolish oaths –

initiated into love  
but first only here –  
when the lava spilled down  
and its breath touched us  
at the mountain's foot,  
when at last the exhausted crater  
surrendered the key  
to these locked-up bodies--

We stepped out into enchanted spaces,  
lighting the darkness around  
with our fingertips.

## VII

Within, your eyes are windows  
on a country where I stand in light.

Within, your breast is like a sea  
that draws me to its bed.

Within, your hips are a mooring  
for my argosies returning  
now from journeys far too long.

Happiness weaves a silver thread  
on which I am held fast.

Within, your mouth is a feathered nest,  
and there my tongue has grown winged.  
Within, your flesh is soft and light, a melon light,  
sweet and luscious without end.  
Within, your veins are quiet, calm,  
filled entirely with gold,  
a gold that I have washed with many tears.  
One day it will be heavier than I.

Title you receive, and your arms embrace goods  
Such as are granted first to you.

Within, your feet are never wandering,  
but have arrived already in my velvet lands.  
Within, your bones are like bright flutes  
from which I charm so many notes,  
these that will enrapture even death...

## VIII

...Earth and sea and sky.  
Ravaged and raked with kisses  
The earth,  
The sea and sky.  
Embraced by my words  
The earth,  
by even my last word embraced,  
The sea and sky.

Haunted by my sounds  
this earth  
that sobbing in my teeth  
cast anchor  
with all its furnaces, towers  
and arrogant high hills,

this stricken earth,  
laying bare before me its ravines  
its steppes, its deserts, tundras,

this restless earth  
with its quivering magnetic fields,  
that bound itself here  
in still unknown chains of power,

this stunned and stunning earth  
with thickets of nightshade,  
leaden poisons  
and currents of sweet fragrance –  
gone down into the sea  
and risen into the sky,  
the earth

## IX

The black cat,  
The oil on the floor,  
The evil eye:

Ill-luck!

Take the horn of coral,  
Hang them before the house,  
Darkness now, no light!

## X

O Love, that broke open  
And cast away our shells, our shield,  
the weather guard, the brown rust of years!

O Sorrow, that has trodden on our love,  
its damp fire in the places that feel most!  
Smoke-filled, perishing in smoke, the flame  
turns in upon itself.

## XII

Mouth, that has slept all night in mine,  
Eye, that watched over as I slept,  
Hand –

And those eyes that ran me through!  
Mouth, that spoke its judgment,  
Hand, that executed me.

### **XIII**

The sun no longer warms, the sea is voiceless now.  
No one opens the graves packed up in snow.  
Is there no grating being filled  
With glowing embers? Yet the glow does nothing.

Deliver me! For I can die no longer.

The saint has other things to do,  
thinking of the city or else of bread.  
The clothesline's grown so heavy with the wash;  
soon it will fall. But it won't cover me.

I am still guilty. Raise me up.  
I am not guilty. Raise me up.

Take the ice kernel from the eye frozen shut.  
With your glances break through,  
Seek the bluest depths,  
Swim, gaze and dive:

I am not it.  
I am it.

## XIV

Wait for my death, then hear me once again!  
The snow basket spills, the water sings;  
All voices gathering into the Toledo; the ice thaws,  
A harmony melting it.  
O the great thaw!

So much awaits you!

Syllables in oleander,  
A word in acacian green,  
These cascading from the wall.

The basins fill,  
moving and bright,  
Music.

## XV

Love has its own triumph and death also has one,  
time and then the time after.  
Yet we have none.

Only stars sinking around us. Reflection and silence.  
Yet the song above our dust, later,  
Will have its own transcendence.

## Days in White

These days I rise with the birch trees  
brushing the corn silk from my brow  
before a mirror of ice.

Now mixed with my breath  
the milk flakes up.  
So early it foams and so easily.  
And where I have breathed on the pane appears,  
painted by child-like fingers,  
your name once again: Innocence.  
After so long a time.

These days it no longer pains me  
that I still can forget  
and yet must remember.

I love. To a white heat I love  
and give thanks with angelic annunciations.  
I have learned them in flight.

These days I think of the albatross  
with which I rose up  
to cross to  
the undescribed country.

On the horizon I just perceive,  
glorious in its decline,  
my fabled continent  
there beyond, which let me go  
in my shroud.

I live and hear from far off its swan song

## Advise Me, Love

Your hat lifts lightly, greets, sways in the wind,  
and your uncovered head has touched the clouds,  
your heart has something somewhere else to do,  
your mouth takes in, takes on new languages,  
the shivering grass is quickly gaining ground,  
the summer blows the asters to and fro,  
blinded with flakes you lift your face to see,  
you laugh and cry, perish by your own hand,  
what else can happen now –

Advise me, Love!

The peacock, ceremonious in amazement, spreads its tail,  
the pigeon roughs its feather collar up,  
filled to the brim with cooing, the air expands,  
the wild duck cries, and now the land itself  
eats of the wild honey, and in the tranquil park  
a golden dust has edged each flower bed.

The fish will blush, then overtake the school,  
diving through grottoes to the coral's bed.  
To silver sand-music the scorpion dances shy.  
The beetle scents its lover from afar.  
And if I had its sense I'd also feel  
some shimmering wings beneath the armored shell,  
and make my way to the farthest strawberry patch.

Advise me, Love!

The water knows to speak,  
each wave takes every other by the hand,  
the grape swells in the vineyard, bursts and falls.  
So guileless steps the snail from its house.

Even a stone can move another stone!

Explain to me, Love, what I cannot explain:  
Say should I spend the brief and horrid time  
with thoughts and only thoughts -- alone  
of love know nothing , have nothing to do with it?  
And must one always think? Won't I too be missed?

You say: another spirit counts on you....  
Say nothing then. For I see the salamander –  
he that passes quick through every fire.  
No terror hunts him, and he feels no pain.

## A Kind of Loss

These used in common: four seasons, books, and a piece  
of music,  
The keys, the tea cups, the bed sheets, and a bed.  
A dowry of words, of gestures, brought along, used, and  
used up.  
A whole household kept and kept up. Said. And done. And  
always a hand outstretched.

With winter, with summer, with a Viennese septet – with  
these I have fallen in love.  
With maps of the countryside, with a cabin, a sea shore,  
and with a bed.  
I honored the cult of important dates, declared promises  
irrevocable,  
Elevated a something, was pious before a nothing,

(-- perhaps a newspaper folded, cold ashes, a brief note)  
Fearless in religion, for our church was this bed.

My inexhaustible painting arose from this view of the lake.  
From my balcony I saw whole crowds of people, my  
neighbors, all there to be greeted.  
By the fireplace, in seclusion, my hair took on its  
ultimate hue.  
The door bell ringing, that was the alarm for my joy.

It is not you I have lost,  
But the world.

## FOR THE UNWISE

### STREETS OF 1992

#### I [Now, standing in the almost empty bar...]

Now, standing in the almost empty bar  
On the hot and humid summer evening,  
I look out through the dusty windows  
Rigged and barred with neon signs, electric blue and red,  
To watch the street where young girls in short pants  
And young men, seeming to be nearly boys  
In baseball caps and short pants to their knees,  
Pass by in milling crowds and smaller groups  
Through the busy and yet empty street:  
A genial and yet nearly savage crowd,  
Following the lures of sex -- unthinking,  
A refuse generation, candid, innocent,  
The leavings, the unlooked-for surplus life  
Of this codified and organized mass death.  
Thus, now, in the time of corporate  
And military culture they are drawn  
By the pitiless entrapments -- of life --  
Into the labyrinth of death -- of alcohol,  
Of cigarettes, and of worse drugs, and money.

They go from bar to bar. The busy street,  
An empty and yet swarming thoroughfare,  
A way of life -- the neon signs, the bars,  
The streetlights and the traffic lights, the cops --  
All this is charged and driven by the force

Of money, of parasitic capital,  
A cage around the undefended life  
Of the not-quite-managed-therefore-marketed,  
Of the undiscovered, uninstructed,  
The casually enslaved and devastated nation  
Held in the steel grip of usury,  
Open to the moonlit and unnoticed summer night –

The cobalt blue, the eastern sky's deep violet,  
The western yellow of the green sunset;  
Then sunrise with its copper and bright orange  
Which floods and cleanses momentarily  
The empty public square, the bar fronts  
And the out-of-business stores, the stop lights  
Hanging in the crimson glare of dawn  
Like charred ampules, the telephone poles  
Like burnt match sticks, the buildings  
Dim then – like an old daguerreotype,  
Or like the photos in a yellowed newspaper  
That one tosses without thinking in the fire.

## II [In the undefended hours of the soul...]

In the undefended hours of the soul,  
At midnight when the empty street  
Is crowded with the bodies of the young –  
In cars, or walking in small groups or gangs  
Convened for brief excursions into bars, clubs,  
Pursuing what they think to be desire,  
Thinking it, too, to be forbidden  
And not mere aimlessness and marketing,  
And sometimes you will see one by himself –  
It's almost always a young man alone  
Wandering the late night city streets,

At those times when the public squares  
Are crowded with casual pick-ups,  
The sole connection possible in this  
The realm and scheme of merchandized humanity,  
The kingdom of the more-than-secular,  
Those hours when the yet still living ghosts,  
Starving, wander the imperfect world,  
The neon-ravaged and the burnt-out world  
Which, unlike them, is absolutely real,  
At such times when I see them I,  
Who come upon the scene so late, a mere observer,  
Watching the arranged, expected waste  
Of human lives, so many lives,  
A silent and unnoticed genocide,  
Much worse than any Auschwitz, decorous,  
Arranged so easily, easily maintained  
In the pleasant and polite United States,

I cannot help but pity them  
Or else despise them – these Americans,  
Souls without bodies, bodies without souls,  
Betrayed – by whom? – into the standardized  
Mass death of mere consumption, ignorance,  
Of mindless jobs and savage entertainment.

### **III [A young woman that I met tonight...]**

A young woman that I met tonight,  
In an expected place, a bar where I had gone  
To get away from the oppressive heat  
Of northern New York in July – a sweet  
Young woman, uninformed, unformed,  
One of the usual and aimless youth,  
Past college but with nothing else to do,  
Partially employed or unemployed,  
Still able through the grace of her young body  
To think the north American fascistic state  
A free and open realm of possibility,  
A young woman, slightly overweight,  
Yet pretty in the soft pathetic way  
Of young Americans, a lonely girl  
Who did not recognize her own exploited  
And narrow place (she tended bar herself),  
Almost a child still, with an open face,  
Sat with me in the air-conditioned gloom  
Of the bar's recesses. And told me everything.  
About her life, her mother, who was Cherokee,  
Her father, Sicilian, whom she despised

With the intensity of twisted love,  
Her mother's poverty, her own. And I,  
Not drunk and yet not sober, led her on  
With my casual and yet friendly questioning,  
Making notes in mind, observing, horrified,  
Seeing not her problems – and she told me only  
some –

But rather the particular and fragile ways  
A human being really quite newly born,  
A human soul – precious, immortal, singular,  
Is stilled in the oppression of commodity  
And crushed just like a flower pressed  
Between the stone-like pages of the laws,  
The laws of usury, of death in life, of death.

## FOR THE UNWISE

### Breath Turning

Stand in the breath-shadow  
Hidden so deep in the light

In sere autumn gold  
Late shining of ice-burned leaves

Reach down to the end of days  
High to the spire of noon

Smoke of my breath in frost air  
My time does not pass but lives

### Gateway

Now chains of gold risen  
From horizons of twisted metal.

The majesty of clouds  
Massing in flocculent bars –

Snow-grey, polar blue –  
Across the opening veins of light,

Annunciating choirs. Now –  
The gateway opens to an unforeseen time

## Location

Harrowing foreign streets  
In the strangeness of deserted  
Near-daylight.

The glory of wind  
In the witnessing and agitated trees –

I declare now the glory of wind.

Violet of rain-shining streets  
In the earliest light.

I declare the beauty of the after-rain,  
Although, in the opening fissure of day,

The wind-abraded, dark  
Crust-like hills in the distance

Are hills of twisted steel.

## **The Other Place**

There  
In the other, the world  
Hidden  
Somewhere inside of this one

The night does not sound  
With the culminating violence  
Of wind and rain  
Or the burning lightning stroke  
That splits the three foot bole  
Of the ancient oak

It is silent  
In the silence  
Of having-never-been-thought,  
Still in the stillness  
Of having-never-been-lived

There  
In the other world  
Hidden  
Somewhere inside of this one

## **For the Unwise**

**F**or the unwise

Who seek the end of the fire  
In the fire

The end of the ice  
In the ice

The end of the wind  
In the wind

The end of the earth  
In the earth

There is the end of the eye  
Somewhere else

The end of the ear  
Elsewhere

The end of the body  
And the life of the body  
Everywhere, everywhere

Elsewhere

In the other fire the other ice  
The other wind the other earth

## Visitor

The world falls and falls  
Through the burning-out of light  
Into the pit of darkness

The word of praise  
Cannot be pulled from the throat

Late sunset and  
The world  
Is paper burning  
Crumbling into flakes  
Of sparkling ash,  
Stars visible with night

What will come then,  
After the humans?

And still I,  
The watcher, the visitor,  
Continue my visit here, curious

## Voice

There was a voice  
In the street

A faint sound before daybreak

It was a sound  
Like the whisper of leaves and of shadows  
Blue shadows  
In the streetlight's greying amber

In the orange and cobalt  
Twilight of dawn

The light post was burnt indigo

In the solid-seeming air  
In the still and  
Almost undisturbed  
Absence of life

There was only the wind  
And the sound of a voice

## **Reminders**

An image in the mind  
Just before daylight,

A moment of breeze blowing by –  
The flow and twist of the bushes,

A shimmer of light  
On the surface of ripples,

A shape as of light  
Molten in sun-leaves –

Over and over (how many times already?)  
You glimpse the shape of your own,

Your lost freedom.

## **To the Primal From of Man**

Power and living strength, virtuous among evil,  
Radiant in the darkness of the earth,  
Angel among the predatory forms,  
Those who cannot recognize your splendor.

## One of Another Origin

See how the radiance falls  
In the evening of time  
Sunset hills are a bed of raked embers.  
The stars are sparkling ash  
Exploding away from the earth-coal,  
Blown by in the interstellar wind.

The one of another origin  
Arrives with the dropping sun –

The stranger,  
The visitor,  
The one from the other world.

Stepped from the quiver of light,  
Stepped from the chains of light,  
Touching  
Here the devastating freedom,  
Wind and empty waters,  
Dark spaces of the devastated world.

I feel a kinship with you.

(It is not this body;  
It is another thing,  
Smoldering in dusty light.

Glories ! –  
The overflowing honeycomb  
In the burnt-black grid of the window pane.)

I feel a kinship with you,  
Though as yet you do not feel it.

I am one of another origin.

Since you wanted me,  
Now you must have me.

## There

Now in its final agony  
The sun goes down –  
Expiring sun-aura – burnt indigo  
And ghostly yellow-green.

The pierced brow of light  
Is tortured in the west.  
Encircled with black hills  
And fading, echo-like, light  
Echoes upward in appeal to a sky  
Now breaking out in stars.

Among hills like twisted iron  
The glowing pool of blood  
Sinks into mauve and copper  
And then to its last dim orange.

Ringed with its rusted metal  
Of hills – there, the volcanic crater  
Where the black and star-filled sky  
Seals the final chances of the day.

## **The Companion**

Breath-light  
Borne in the being  
Of inner glory

And so  
I have chosen and chosen  
I bear the seed of light  
In my hand

I bear the tongue of light  
In my mouth  
In the mouth of the other  
The stranger

Who always  
Is near me  
Listening closely  
Speaking sometimes

For he is all that is left  
Of the other world

## Chant

This is the burnt-out world  
The ashen world  
Chaotic, hypnotized  
The realm of all hungers, all souls  
The barely alive scarcely to be touched  
The world of light and dust  
And the ashen whisper of fire  
In fallen and piled leaves  
(Only the whisper of fire)  
And our names traced in dust  
Chanted from the face of cloth  
Sealed with its drops of wax  
Whispering names and our two  
In the ear of the stone god  
Written down in the ash  
Of white leaves and of red roses  
In the smallest possible,  
In an infinitesimal script

## The Given Speech of Men

But it was Italian –  
Felicitous speech of sunlight and bright stone,  
Italian –

Its elegant concision and quickness,  
Its studious formality,  
Its rhythmic power and agitated vehemence,  
Its ancient and Latin heritage  
Forever borne, renewed and changed,  
Possessed, as living speech, as history,  
As struggle, thus, as life itself  
In the streets of Rome  
And of Bologna,  
Of Naples and Palermo.

But I – held captive  
And immured in the unwieldy mongrel tongue of the  
Anglo-Saxons,

The language of modern empires  
And hence of massacres,  
The speech of torturers, liars and usurers,  
The modern fountain and origin of lies,  
Of technologically disseminated lying  
That causes to grow up within it, all around it, everywhere,  
The very and peculiar darkness  
Of historical amnesia –  
Its ridiculous psychobabble,  
Its absurd and merchandized cacophonies,  
Its debased, debasing chatter,  
Its omnivorous decadence – I, held captive  
In the ubiquity of English,  
That sea which never touches any shore,

How could I speak? With whom?  
What could I say to them, and where, and when?

For  
When a language transgresses its boundaries,  
It becomes, inescapably, a language of lies.

### **Early Life**

It was never any good between us, let's admit –  
You nuns, with all your invalids to nurse,  
You priests, always ministering to the sick.

You wanted to teach me how to suffer.  
I wanted to learn how to live.

## Italian Immigrants

You – the impoverished,  
You who left your country  
When your country was in ruin,  
You who left your culture  
When your culture was near death,  
You who left your language  
When your language was being killed,  
Bloated with the rhetoric  
Of lies and usury,

Now in your retirement,  
On the seventh day of your labors,  
In the grandeur of the bright Floridian sun  
Or sitting on the back porch  
There in Utica, Detroit, or Bensonhurst –

You, O august and admired ancient race,  
Who once in Naples, Campobasso, or Cosenza,  
Or somewhere near Palermo  
Trod the ancient soil,  
What do you feel about what you have done  
Now that your day is passed?  
You made your choice.  
What do you think of it?

## Days of 1967

### I

Sisters, fathers,  
How I remember you from earlier days,  
My ancient time of ignorance and curiosity.  
Then you were charged  
With bringing us to knowledge –  
Knowledge for the ignorant,  
And for the uninitiate  
(I will not say the innocent), guidance;  
Guidance especially for us enthralled  
By the idiotic and sub-human  
Culture of consumption, the neo-capitalist regime  
Of hedonistic selfishness and greed  
Which at that very time  
Was burning Southeast Asia,  
Incinerating villages with napalm fire.  
Those were the evil days in which you worked.  
These were your responsibilities.  
We were your living tasks.  
What did you do?

## II

How well  
I still remember  
The old pious nun  
Who led us in our praying  
For the brave war effort:  
"These are our bullets," fingering her beads  
And turning toward the crucifix  
Nailed to the pastel-painted concrete wall.

Perhaps  
The incinerated  
Villages  
Were drifting down to us,  
Somehow,  
On Wednesday of Ashes.  
Ashes  
Pressed against  
Our foreheads  
Like a seal, a remnant of the fire  
Of ancient prophecy.  
A grate of dusty coals  
Was raked together  
And divided up among us,  
Each to their own portion –  
Dust and embers, leavings,  
Dark ritual of Catholic charity,  
Communion of burnt-out coals for all who come.

I felt the musty damp,  
The bitter taste of ash and smoke.  
Around me – dampened rage of impotence,  
The hushed and solemn protocol  
Of sanctimonious hypocrisy,

The swish of efficient habits and cassocks,  
Clicking of knee-length rosary beads  
Tinkling like bead curtains  
In an antique whore house.

### III

The smudge  
And dribble of silken ash  
Was pressed onto my brow.  
I wore it all that day,  
Feeling not quite myself, wearing  
Its insignia, a cross  
Upon my face –  
Weightless, insubstantial, nothing,  
And yet everything.  
How strange it always looked,  
Like streaks of water-staining  
On the face of the stone Virgin in the church's yard  
Running as though in tears down both her cheeks.  
Yet it was dust  
And ashes unmistakably,  
Like the dust left on a bedroom wall  
By the wings of a crushed moth.  
The fabled moths of scripture  
Having frayed and worn the world  
Were leading it  
To its candle flame at last.

Feeling the world burnt-out and hollow,  
Frail like old cinders  
To the merest touch,

I walked its thin carpet of just-fallen snow  
On my way back home  
Down dim and silent  
And still winter streets.

## Morning, Looking West

Early morning and the air is already warm.  
The sun is rising behind me.  
My shadow flickers and beams out ahead  
Over the dry grass and outcropping rocks.

The sky to the north and west  
Is full of violets and greens;  
In the east it's a yellow and orange-bronze.  
The sun is red just over the hill to my back.

When I turn around I see,  
Framed in its glare,  
The slim silhouette of a tree, black,  
Like a jagged crust of dried blood.

The grass along the path sides is tall, spindly and brittle;  
Some stalks are broken in half and hanging –  
Bleached blond or pale yellow  
With some light yellow-green or gold roots.

In some places it's burnt-looking and brown,  
Like a scorch mark on a white cotton shirt.  
At one spot a bush I don't recognize grows near the path.  
The bare spines have a knuckled and arthritic look.

I climb the steep path that twists  
Around through the rocks; in the light already strong  
The brown sand at my feet twinkles and sparks.  
There are goat droppings here and there, dry and ashy  
like cinders.

Then in the middle of the path  
I find a small wheel in the dirt.  
It looks to be from a baby carriage  
Or perhaps from a child's bicycle.

From the hilltop facing the west the Tyrrhenian Sea  
Is an unmarked expanse of water.  
The sun makes it green and turquoise in the shallows.  
Farther out it's a steel-blue crust with an active and  
crinkling skin.

Shriveled-looking at points, serried and undulating  
Like the peristaltic surface of a worm moving  
Or a snake shedding a blue-green skin,  
As though something under the surface were dragging itself  
out to sea.

Very quickly now the night moves on farther to the west.  
The sun is above the hill, the sky an intense violet blue.  
Some sea gulls – flashing white in the sun –  
Wheel out toward the south. All at once,

I notice some fishing boats here and there.  
They had been there all along, of course.  
Seventy years ago, a hundred years,  
These people followed night

To the golden country far to the west.  
They lived there in that strange, unaccommodating place,  
Amid its foreign customs,  
Using its cumbersome language –

Lived there finding only wages, not gold,  
And poor wages too. Some of them soon returned,  
And others did after a time. Sometimes  
One would come back late in life.

But most of them never did.  
They never came back to the dry rocky land,  
To the poor farms or the small fishing boats,  
To the blue sea and the blue and empty sky,

But lived there instead, forgotten, resigned to that place,  
Lived there and worked and died.

## History Lessons

How many years we all sat there,  
My friends and I,  
Acceptingly in class.  
And there we learned of many things,  
Patiently, acceptingly.  
But when did we ever learn of America?

So many and such complicated strands.  
The story ramifies. Uncontainable,  
It overflows all boundaries.  
The middle class of the United States  
Is caught in the tangling web,  
The story of America –

America, whose substance is the abstraction of money,  
Where, at any moment, the iron cage is locked  
To close you out  
Unless you go faster and faster,  
Every American  
A tiny red ant scurrying.

How much the wise have hidden out of sight.  
The many want to keep it there.  
And yet the knot of usury  
Will not undo itself.

It lives our death; we die its life.  
And yet we must be innocent,  
Autonomous, and free....  
The thought is staggering, hilarious.

Therefore I laugh  
When I see an old woman  
Pushing her cartful of junk down the street  
And laugh  
When I see an old man  
Searching through the dumpster for food.

I laugh.

I laugh.

## **The Question of the Other**

If we could twist ourselves  
To thread the narrow keyhole of the past,  
As dusty spinning light bars  
Slip through barred windows of the torture cell,

If we could twist ourselves,  
As time is bent and twisted  
In the mind, like prayer beads  
Knotted in an old man's fist,

As memory is twisted,  
Bent, reflected all about  
The hall of mirrors  
Of a cemetery's gleaming polished marble,

Where tablets shine  
As white as dry ice  
In the winter sun  
And glare like signal mirrors,

If we could turn ourselves  
And twist ourselves  
To peer into the brass doorknob of time,  
To see our own reflection there  
And know what lies behind the door,

If we could twist ourselves,  
Like steel that's beaten into wire,  
And slip beneath the locked door of the past,  
Like winter sunlight gleaming past

The spools of razor wire,  
Like rain that blows across a wrought-iron fence,  
Like sand that slips  
The hour glass's clutch,

If we could twist ourselves  
And thread our way in through the narrow lock,  
As through a needle's eye, into our origin,  
The womb of our peculiar time –

The strange and blood-stained room  
With its blunt precision instruments –  
To see, to know, to feel,  
To see, to know,

To stand there at our birth  
And at the advent of our world,  
What would we see and know?  
What would we feel?

## America

Others may speak  
Of their own disgraces,  
I speak of mine  
Here and now.

America, my country,  
Homeland of the homeless –  
How you stand out among all nations,  
A laughingstock or a terror.

In your house, illusion reigns.  
You love the lie, and  
Every lie is passed around like currency.  
But truth must be kept silent,  
Out of sight.  
Why is this?

What can be done  
With your vast plutonium dump sites?  
Your poisonous water  
And contaminated soil?

Your burnt-out smoking cities?  
Your unemployed and illiterate millions?  
Your 26,000  
Hydrogen bombs?

Doesn't the vomit  
Rise in your throat from self-loathing?  
The nations come together to denounce you.  
How can you stand the disgust,  
The unanimous outrage you inspire?

You are a failure, suicidal,  
A horror, a disgrace –  
Your promises not even broken,  
Merely serving as bad jokes.

## Columbus Day

You who left the most august of cultures  
For the meanest and most impoverished,  
Fleeing one poverty – settled and archaic –

For a modern one, out of the frying pan  
Of burning, light-drenched Italy,  
Into the fire of the frozen continent

Stuck in the ice of anti-this-or-that  
And going nowhere, floating, out of time,  
An empty and mythically exalted *space* –

You, workers merely and exploited ones,  
Working, always working and yet always poor,  
Never having time to rest, to think, to live,

Planning your return to the mezzogiorno  
Postponed in gathering despair from year to year,  
No time to learn to read or write English,

(The immigrant *uses* the new language,  
And that's it) captive to a desperate anxiety  
Known only to the unskilled working poor,

Captive guest workers of the liberal state,  
Supporters of Mussolini by default  
And through your lauded savior Roosevelt,

Is this what you imagined when you left?  
(Yet who imagines when they haven't eaten?)  
Did you never think what you were doing here?

## Speaking in the United States

Where are the words  
To speak of what is true?  
The words which in themselves  
Would show the truth,  
The words which, spoken out,  
Would somehow speak  
What each of us must know

Transparency of glass?  
Yet broken glass  
Is in our speech instead.  
I hear the grinding  
And the crackling and scrape  
Of broken glass  
Beneath a military boot.  
It has the slow-paced measured creak  
Of the university professor's  
Chalk  
Upon the blackboard  
In the classroom  
Far away,  
Yes, very far away.

Or then  
The mirror's clarity?  
Instead our speech  
Is like a shattered mirror  
Showing all in splinter fragments,  
Bright slivers sharp as knives.  
A shrapnel-speech is ours instead.  
That is what we have.

## Hobos

Hobos: how many hobos wandered here beneath the blue  
and exalted sky of northern New York State? the  
green and sun-burnt land that flows with all its  
pastures and its upland woods to the north and south  
and to the east and west

Hobos: men with no money, with no home, no food. How  
many stole crab apples from the rocky disused  
pasture here beyond the sagging wire fence? its gray  
rain-eaten posts now frail and light as old driftwood

How many homeless, wandering and not quite or  
very-much-less-than men – the troll, the were-wolf  
and the bogey man of backyard campfire scare-  
each-other-and-yourself rural tale telling sessions in  
the ancient time before the TV set, or lurking rapist  
of post-pubescent female nightmare and imagining

How many rummaged like raccoons in garbage cans? How  
many beg on the streets of the county seat farming  
towns – Cortland, Watertown, or Binghamton?

How many plunder restaurant garbage dumps or gather  
newspapers for their jacket sleeves and frayed pant  
legs to insulate themselves when rain and freezing  
rain make the bare boughs of the maple a glossy  
black?

How many scarecrows crucified in empty fields in red  
evening sun?

Hobos. That utopian society hymned by the inspired and voluble Whitmanian son of the millionaire candy manufacturer. Thus: "...dotting immensity they lurk across her, knowing her yonder breast snow-silvered, sumac-stained or smoky blue..." A utopian society for sure, and sagely peripatetic.

So, walking and walking, they froze. And how many others froze? And their rotted stockings become, in time, fused to the skin itself. And have you ever seen a case of frostbite-induced gangrene? And have you ever seen the teeth of a man long homeless? And what would an autopsy on the average hobo reveal, aside from the expectable cirrhosis?

That's the way it is for the displaced, unused and unemployed, the unwanted and unneeded surplus male population of the proletarian and sub-proletarian United States driven out from everywhere and wandering to starve

Those whom a pampered famous upper bourgeois American feminist now long tenured at Stanford has recently referred to as hobos, as in: "...the girasol...her tubers the Jerusalem artichoke that has fed the Indians, fed the hobos...."

But why should these hobos need to be fed? Need, that is, to dig a weed with bare hands from the earth and eat it raw.

Why should any living man eat grass?

## **Gilded Monuments**

World-of-light  
Burns in the body of gold  
My golden form  
Can never die

My shape of light  
Is immortal  
Yet the slow apocalypse  
Still tallies up

In golden grains  
Of sand

## Gnosis

Breath-light  
In the unthought-of  
Clarity

The lived and translucent  
Burned-beyond  
By a fire

Of the most remote kindling

Like the skins of an onion  
The nearest  
Held up to the day

Powers of the sun  
Flow through striations  
The webbing and weave

The epidermal  
Illusion ply after ply  
Enhanced with a clear fluidity

So unlike tears  
As to cause them  
Approaching the center

## **The Invisible World**

The spatter and splash of coins  
Being dropped into a pile of other coins  
A crumbling hiss of metal  
As of blade being struck on blade  
If the jar is sloshed around  
The sound of agitated money  
Is the sound of sharpening knives

A sea of knives that gathers  
A dead weight of momentum  
Contained within the invisible  
The brittle the stiff and fragile glass

And if the jar is broken  
It will explode in bright crumbs  
Cutting shards and then the deluge  
The jackpot the avalanche of metal

## Light-Compulsion

The deep autumn  
Light  
Eludes the leaf  
The light that it wants is elsewhere

The tree reaches outward  
For light  
Although it is light itself  
The concentric rings of a tree stump  
Are echoes echoing  
Light

Like the spreading of ripples

Ripples of the  
Light-stone  
Dropped stone of light-ripples  
Dropped stone of  
Compulsion-for-light

The tree reaches upward, outward and outward  
And yet it's enormously slow  
Far too slow

The tree rippling sere leaves  
In the wind  
Shedding them silently – yellow, hay green  
And burnt orange

Is the slowest, the least  
Of what is already gone –  
Darkened shell-of-light left behind –  
Gone far past the world  
And out toward the other worlds

### **Returning**

Over and over  
The tree-spattering blood  
Of the sun's crucifixion  
Declares:

The one who died  
Was not the Father,

The one who died  
Was not the Son,

The one who died  
Was not the earth-born envoy  
Of the three-in-one.

Over and over  
The day is catastrophe,  
The cataclysmic descent  
Every evening.

Always light dies at dusk,  
And the sky darkens  
And over the whole earth  
It grows dark.

The black crystal of night  
Is placed on the earth's tomb.

Every morning again  
The horizon's shell-crack  
Bursts with the blood-yoke of dawn,  
Always so far this return.

Yet there must be an end to returning.

## Leaving

In the autumn evening  
The sun bleeds dire and red  
In its darkening  
Crucifixion  
Beyond the twisted black tree line of hills.

Beyond the black-cruised hills  
The sun spurts its blood.  
Ejaculation  
Of blood-light pierces  
Black tangles of the tree line.

The sun leaves its blood  
Beyond the crown-of-thorn hills  
Encircling the expiring head  
Of the figure of light,  
The unearthly shape of all earthly light.

## Sand-Light

Unknown –

In the grains of sand-light, of mud-light,  
The trace of light given  
Albeit unknown,  
Given, not kept, not withheld  
Undisguised – you who would cover me  
You who would shroud me

Unnoticed, unseen,  
The still-sharp unaccountable power

Not yet to be thought,  
Not allowed,  
O more than  
Memory

Sand-light  
Blown into the eye that wants to close,  
Sand-light  
Spittle, bright glass shards,  
Dried flakes of mud

Yet the powers of the world  
Cannot close the lids of the sea,  
Cannot close the oracles of light,  
Cannot close the listening ear of time,  
Cannot close the opening hands of the horizon  
Opening wider and wider  
To the black and starry sky  
Until they touch, finally, albeit secretly,  
The edge of the forgotten world

## Summons and Saying

To neither the world of water  
Nor the burnt-out ashen world  
Yet you must come with me  
Following my voice  
That sounds throughout the labyrinth  
Of the burning night the freezing night  
The marketed and frozen space  
Of rumored commodity and chance  
Black syllables of ice-burned leaves  
Black leaves that tremble in the moonlight wind

Echoing within the burnt and frozen ear  
Pressed against the stone partitions  
Of the tedious and solitary night –  
O magical confused, silencing deafness! –  
The icy black leaves passed  
From hand to hand to mouth

To neither the world of water  
Nor to the burnt-out ashen world  
Yet you must come

## Inscriptions

And there is autumn, the season of walking and watching

There is the evening of the sun

The fellowship of paper

The compulsion to listen

The desire to see

The desire to see once again

The habit of waking

The path of sleep

The world before this one

The life within life within death

The long-forgotten dead – a man, a woman, a boy, a girl

Anticipating sunrise

The life never to come

Wandering old cemeteries

The half-moon over the house

The memory of your grandmother  
The empty apartment just before leaving  
The flakes of snow on your coat sleeve in the school yard  
A picture of your father as a boy  
The long shadow of a scarecrow in the dawn cornfield  
The red-amber light on the stubble and leaves  
The friend of your youth  
First love and the last  
Sleeping alone, the total solitude  
The world that is not, inside the world that must be  
How tired you are of waiting

## Vocation

Tell me the name  
Of the real and living virtue one must have  
To make one's life what it must be,  
Not the life the others had assumed –  
Something waiting to be taken up  
Like clothes laid out by someone else,  
A life imagined, planned, inspirited by others  
And with foreign things –

Life lived  
In the hallway of the grade school building  
Pulling on our winter boots,  
Glittering in the font of holy water near the church's door,  
Felt in the listening silence  
Of the cloth-darkened confessional  
Or in the back lot  
Chasing the red sunset's light  
That gleamed across the silhouette of a football  
Or in the grassy cemetery when, in deep cornflower blue  
And luminous violet, September evening died –  
The rows of gravestones on the edge of the hill's breast  
So black against the low light's yellow-green.

But tell me now the name  
Of the virtue one must have  
To bend the shapes of life to fit one's own,  
To draw indifference and malevolence  
Into a pattern not their own  
Like iron filings in the magnet's will.

You, the unknown  
Beyond the paper wall of silence  
Where your shadow passed,  
And where your holy written name  
In being said aloud  
Is constantly erased and re-inscribed,  
You must be the witness of our living task,  
Yet your powers are still, silent in the written page.

## **Walking Somewhere**

Faint, dry odors of the autumn field  
Just barely present around me.

The shimmer and heat of the burning summer are gone.  
No longer the undergrowth  
Tangling your foot  
Or its breathing warmth felt near the ground  
right through the shoe;  
No longer the golden humming warmth, September.

The Queen Anne's lace is brown and stiff,  
Curled in,  
And the blown dry milkweed pod is blackened at its  
wrinkled edge.

The grass is stiffening and darkening to brown.  
The wild flowers are mostly gone,  
No cabbage whites are in the air.

And now where am I? What is this place?

The field goes on for a mile or more,  
Reaching far to the grey collapsing barn set off in its  
wide empty field of yellow grass  
And the two white raised posts of the railroad crossing.

Yet a single step puts you outside the world.

October's sky is blue. The air is absolutely clear  
As I look out far across to the field's opposite edge.

There's a vague and confusing lostness somewhere near me  
Saying *anywhere, go anywhere....*  
I can almost touch it.

I can almost reach out for it  
And almost – unbearably – just touch it.

## Walking Toward Sundown

It is evening now and cold and autumn,  
And I walk out toward the burnt and fiery horizon  
Into the steady buffeting cold wind

How rapidly the whole sky is changing  
And how fast the sunset clouds are moving by

The low sun splinters crimson through the bramble of  
dark trees  
Though cold and with my face raw in the wind  
(My eyes are tearing now)  
I still can feel  
Its elusive surviving radiance and strength

I walk through slanted planes of light  
The world is tipping rapidly away  
My crooked shadow ripples on brown tiger fur –  
Then waves of blonde and copper and half-radiant  
long grass  
Slow my unsteady and illuminated double

I see him – from his cumbersome thick shoe  
And long pant leg almost a stilt  
To the wake of his light-pointed long and wind-blown hair

In his head somewhere  
Is the thought of where he might rest

He must not be told  
It is only in the sun up ahead

## Wind

Wind moving through deserted streets  
Wind early in the morning  
Wind in the empty fields at the edge of town  
Tumbling stray paper scraps  
Bending the heads of the tall brown grass  
And the reeds of the cattails in the swampy bottom, making  
    them tremble as they bend in unison

Wind in the frost-seared lilac bushes, wind through the red  
    bramble of the shrubs  
And in the tops of the ornamental cherry trees and the  
Japanese maple, wind active and unceasing

Wind through the empty window of the old tar-papered  
    shack, deserted now who knows how many years  
The steady strong cold wind blowing in one window and  
    leaking through the cracks and spaces of the old  
    gray boards  
Gray boards the color of an old dish rag

Wind in the empty hollows where no step has been in years  
    since what was done there once was done at last  
    and couldn't be undone or ever be forgotten

And now it is forgotten

Where the early morning light turns tall grass gold in silent  
    peace and loneliness

While the wind is in the trees the flocks of crows scattering  
and the trees themselves entirely embraced by the  
indescribable wind, enveloping and never giving  
way

Wind blowing through the yard of the old roundhouse three  
miles out of town where it sits in a nowhere of  
patchy tall grass and weeds and bare-scraped cinder  
yard – old cinders, gravel chips and small stones,  
pieces of crumbled brick, and sometimes a green  
beer bottle or a bullet-holed tin can –

There where three tracks converge and maze about in an  
outmoded version of efficiency

The roundhouse itself squat and rather small, old brick and  
cement with weeds grown through and the windows  
boarded and some of the boards gone, leaving  
splintered gaps into the dark interior

And now, right now, the wind is shivering the tall weeds  
and making the tops of the maple trees lean and  
shift about like water weeds in a current

Wind in the open rolling grass out near the airport where  
my grandfather and I hunted rabbits in the fall

Wind in the bent and stunted wild apple trees we  
sometimes picked a few small apples from and  
dropped them in the pockets of our hunting vests  
where they got warm from the October sun *Eh.*  
*When you thirsty, he would say, you eat a one, two.*  
*They okay.*

Wind, how you visit all these places equally, moving over  
them, through them, leaving them

## Landscape

As in a film by Pasolini –

Late afternoon. The overwhelming sun.  
Bright clouds are moving to the hot and steady breeze.  
The maple trees and oaks along the boulevard  
Are slightly rippling and disturbed.  
The light is sharp, intense and clear,  
A razor flash on windows, steel fittings, car windshields.  
Now light is genuinely light, shadow is shadow now --

As in a film by Pasolini.

The clarity of space combining  
With a brief and yet intense  
Illumination of the world –  
As though the widest angle lens were stretching,  
bending space

To make it more than visible,  
To make it more than real – palpable,  
Ample, fillable, complete,  
A bright and all-containing realm,  
Seen with a pure illuminated gaze  
Into an ultimate and sacred world –

As in a film by Pasolini.

The world of sky and clouds, of light and earth,  
Of trees and foliage, of the seen and unseen winds,  
Of the changing dispositions and the shapes of clouds,  
Of rolling wind shadows over hills and fields,  
Of the shining light-transfigured earth,  
The earth transformed by Christianity –

The many, one; the silent, whispering;  
The world now naked, unforeseen, and burning  
In its bright external splendor, its irrational darkness.  
Now I see what is before me and as it is.

As in a film by Pasolini.

Yet what is it to know, and what is it to have?  
I walk along the street, taking in the day,  
The bright sun warm upon my shoulder,  
While only blocks away the houses of the poor  
Burn and swelter, huddled in the devastated street:

The light that sparks and mirrors from an  
aluminum-patched roof,  
The white and peeling paint, the cluttered sagging porch,  
The bathroom with no door,  
The plastic tarpaulin nailed to an old unpainted  
window frame,  
Still nailed there, flashing dully in the sun,  
The dirt yards full of broken bikes and disused cars on  
blocks,  
The open fire hydrant, the police who come, the children  
scattering,  
The open fire hydrant when they leave,  
Its rooster tail of water arcing up above the crowd of thirty  
children  
Splashing, running, fighting, screaming, laughing –

The older one who holds the empty coffee can  
Against the hydrant's open breach  
And all the other's running through the sunlight and water  
  veil –  
The foamy water shimmering, as though in sand waves,  
  
Out along the hot and empty street and running into gutter

pools,  
The silence in the empty street, no children anymore,  
The water in mud puddles reflecting the bright evening sun,  
Day and then coming night among the poor –

As in a film by Pasolini.

## Edge of Town

### I

The world begins where we want it to begin.  
(What does it mean, the fact that I say *we*? Do I really mean  
just I?)

The world is not what it appears to be. It is another thing.

Or perhaps it is what it appears to be but not as it appears.  
It exists in another way.

It lives another life – beyond the one we guess at –  
and creates other worlds, of which we have heard  
only rumors.

Rumors which, though real and continuous, are never  
spoken aloud. They are entirely silent. They  
accompany each thing, each person, and each place  
like a host of crossing shadows.

## II

The place where I am standing now, the field at the edge of town with two abandoned houses – pale yellow the color of pumpkin seeds, peaked roofs and gables and the windows on the first floor boarded up and the basement windows boarded up, is nowhere, is insignificant.

And fifty yards behind me, beyond the copse of twisted stag horn sumac, is the railroad embankment. The Delaware-Lackawanna freight train goes by once a day.

Beside my foot is a flattened, rain-gray paper cup and near that is a used-up plastic lighter the color of a car's tail lights and a pile of cigarette butts.

The grass is brown. It is autumn. The brown grass wavers silently in the breeze, it is cold and damp from the early morning rain.

The morning sky is very blue with large and closely spaced lily pads of cumuli lit brightly from overhead.

They flow and pour across the arc of sky. There is a breeze, and their shadows pass across the field, darkening it in waves.

This place, this field which is not important, is always presupposed by the ideas that anyone might have of it. Yet none of these ideas fits. This is a paradox.

### III

Because of the rain and because it's still mid-morning, the  
field has the scent of earliness.

Is it late, however, for someone to be thinking of the  
world? Is the world long past thinking of?

Anything we say about it must be false, yet buried in the  
falsehood, somewhere, must be truth. There the  
world must be.

And somewhere, somehow, we ourselves must also be.  
Left beneath the embers of the world, we ourselves  
will rise up one day, will rise up then when we arise  
from sleep.





## AFTERWORD

### Encounters With the Author in Taipei

We first made the author's acquaintance at a well-known restaurant in Taipei, the Wysteria Tea House, famous as having been a meeting place for dissident intellectuals in the years of political struggle in Taiwan. During the recent effort to publish his rather extensive work, we had occasion to discuss aspects of his past and current writing.

*Your poetry is quite varied in style and form. Where do you locate yourself in the overall debate concerning poetic form?*

I consider myself eclectic. The main thing for me is to grasp, mentally, a certain object – that is, an experience, a scene, an event. Any language that seems to convey the reality of that is good, any which remains merely language, merely words, is negative, in the sense of being obstructive.

*A cliché?*

Yes or not even a cliché but in a way worse than that. Much of our language obscures the nature of reality. Words in themselves are, in a sense, the enemy of writing. I tell students that all the time. Words most often merely convey the usual accepted social understanding. Writing is for the purpose of grasping reality itself, which is always something other than the social understanding.

*Do you consider yourself a political writer?*

All writing is political in the sense of attempting to correct these false social understandings. At times its purpose is to merely reveal with a new freshness, a perceptual freshness, as it were. But even this has a certain political significance, in the sense that then people may think, and then act, differently than they had before. And the results of that are unpredictable.

*Does living outside the United States help or hinder your writing?*

I think it helps, in general. It is in some ways a very undeveloped culture, yet in other ways it is overbearing. (The US, that is.) There is, for example, a great deal of rather stifling political correctness, as it's called, and to get away from that is itself a positive thing. For a while I had no idea how I would ever get all this material published, especially if you're not there trying to do all the "networking" that is needed, and which I was absolutely terrible at anyway – worse than terrible, I really had no clue, I still don't, I suppose. And then it came about that you could just do it all by yourself – or with a small amount of help, which I've had – by means of computers, the new printing technology, and of course the internet.

*How much material is it? It's quite a lot, it would seem.*

Yes, I guess it's about 40 volumes or so. Almost 3,000 pages, if you want to measure it like that. I don't know how much it would weigh.

*There seem to be many styles represented. Was that something you consciously strove for?*

Yes. I always wanted to be able to represent a wide variety of experiences. And that seemed to me the way to do it.

*What sorts of things are you working on currently?*

Well as you know I'm trying to get all this existing work published, going through it, touching it up here and there, proofreading, and so forth. After that, I think I might return to some translating work – Holderlin especially, and some Chinese poets, but don't ask me which ones.

*All right, but can you say whether they are modern or classical?*

Classical. My favorite is Mung Hao-Ren, actually.

*There are many other things to talk about, but perhaps you could mention some of your influences.*

I would just say that I think the reader will notice echoes of Dylan Thomas, Hart Crane, Keats, and others. There's Frost, about whom I wrote a short book, there's Yeats, and in particular Whitman, but also more contemporary people such as Oppen, Elizabeth Bishop, and others. I wrote four books of poems, which I called odes, partly in imitation of Larry Eigner and the French poet Pierre Reverdy. A long poem called *The Second Life of Fire* was influenced by Ashbery, but also by Breton and Heiner Muller. An early long poem called *Second World* was indebted to Blake, Shelley, and Whitman, but also to Robert Duncan, Ginsburg, and Ted Hughes, as well as Hugh MacDiarmid. My work in general seems to occupy an intersection between Surrealism and Romanticism, speaking just very

broadly, a conjunction that many modern poets have worked, but in recent years perhaps rather few, at least in English.

*You've written on Frost, isn't that right?*

Yes, it was originally my dissertation and then was published by a small Canadian press. I wrote a short book on the American Surrealist Philip Lamantia – I knew him slightly, actually – and then I wrote a book on Elizabeth Bishop which was accepted by Rodopi, but I withdrew it because I wanted to change some things. Health problems and other things intruded. But I hope to resubmit the revised book to them again pretty soon.

*As a way to conclude: what are your feelings about living in Taiwan?*

I love Taiwan, the place, the people. And the history is very interesting, and also very moving. When I came here, it seemed to me that I had found a place where life was in some ways more natural and where the people were themselves more sensible and sane. But don't tell them that I said that.

*Ok. We promise we won't tell anyone.*

Ok. Then my secret's safe.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

STEVEN FRATTALI is an American writer living in Taipei and Boston. He is the author to date of over 40 volumes of poetry. He is also the author of several critical works, among them *Person, Place and World: A Late Modern Reading of Robert Frost* (ELS, 2002) and *Hypodermic Light: The Poetry of Philip Lamantia and the Question of Surrealism*. (Peter Lang, 2005)

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